

In the Spirit of Hegel



ROBERT C. SOLOMON

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A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's
Phenomenology of Spirit

Robert C. Solomon

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In the spirit of Friendship,
for Jay & Eileen,
for Lee & Meredith,
for Christopher & Ann

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Preface

... it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born—so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world. —Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (para. 11)

It is early autumn, 1806.

It is that time of year when philosophy professors are writing up their summer research, shaking off the pressureless days of thought and solitude, preparing with mixed anticipation, gratitude, and annoyance their lectures for the coming term.

But this is 1806, and the city is Jena. The university is one of the oldest in Europe, but this is not a normal term. It will never begin, and it is on no one's mind. Within earshot of these hallowed academic halls are the troops of Napoleon. The cannonade has already started. The distant thunder foretells the crumbling of Europe's oldest empire, long disintegrated anyway into a hundred squabbling states and petty principalities. (Neither "holy," nor "Roman," nor an "empire," Voltaire had quipped, a half-century before.)

There were many Germans who welcomed the intrusion, despite the dangers. To them, Napoleon was not merely a foreign invader; he was the incarnation of the glorious revolution in France which

they had avidly followed as students. Wordsworth's words had never applied better than to them, "Twas bliss in that dawn, to be alive: But to be young was very heaven." Of course, many were shocked and confused about the later phases of the revolution, the "Reign of Terror" of 1792–95. But there were many intellectuals, Immanuel Kant, for example, who condoned even the Terror as a necessary trauma in the realization of the new ideals; and even those who never took the revolution all that seriously, the great poet Goethe, for example, could become enthusiastic about the impending revitalization of German culture. Whatever one's views, the sheer imminence of Napoleon and his Continental army made indifference impossible and anxious speculation inevitable.

Few can view an invasion by foreign armies with unqualified enthusiasm. Napoleon was dangerous. But for a century and a half, since the Thirty Years War (1618–48), most of the scattered and isolated German principalities (nearly 250 of them) had been badly ruled by petty tyrants who spouted the fashionable Enlightenment slogans in the courts of their feudal abuses. (Jena, where Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* was something of an exception.) In a Europe now prospering with bourgeois business and breathing the heady vapors of "liberty, equality, fraternity," the petty princes closed their states to the world, taxed and demoralized their citizens, suppressed ideas and local culture, and retreated into the pretensions of French court life or the vacuum of medieval life, a life whose spirit had long since died but whose structures still stood, like the walls of the ancient towns. To the young breed of restless intellectuals in Germany, Napoleon did indeed seem like "liberation," and since the emperor described his own policies in terms of "liberation" rather than conquest (whatever his designs), bringing with him the reforms of the French Revolution and the end of the old and already half-dead world, the general reaction in Germany could only be enthusiastic, if qualified. The dominant image of the epoch was the birth of a new world, a change in the very *concept* of reality.

In spring of 1806, G.W.F. Hegel, an assistant professor at the University of Jena, ended his lectures, on the "philosophy of Spirit";

Gentlemen! We find ourselves in an important epoch, in a fermentation, in which Spirit has made a leap forward, has gone beyond its previous concrete form and acquired a new one. The whole mass of ideas and concepts that have been current until now, the very bonds of the world, are dissolved and collapsing into themselves like a vision in a dream. A new emergence of spirit is at hand; philosophy must be the first to hail its appearance and recognize it, while others,

resisting impotently, adhere to the past, and the majority unconsciously constitute the matter in which it makes its appearance.

Many years ago, he had followed the revolution in France with enthusiasm. He now watched hopefully as the fruits of that revolution were about to be brought home to Germany: the end of a world, the beginning of a new one. In the midst of all this trauma, he was finishing a book, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this context of turmoil and terror, hope and expectation, what sort of book could it be?

If one reads most of the commentaries and studies that have been written ever since, one would think that it is a ponderous book on metaphysics, perhaps a resurrection of Aristotle, a contribution to post-Kantian idealism and a most unorthodox defense of Christianity. For those more learned and schooled in German thinking, it is an introduction to a philosophical "system" which would compete with the rival but sibling systems of Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling. Marxist and existentialist readers seem certain that it is primarily a demonstration of a new form of logic called "dialectic." Explicitly, it is an exercise in *Wissenschaft* or "Science," a journey to "the Absolute," but both "Science" and "the Absolute" are little more than obligatory bows to the internal politics of academic professionalism. Not that Hegel didn't indulge in that: the *Phenomenology* is Hegel's late attempt to enter the philosophical lists of German Idealism, to prove his originality and independence from Schelling and the Romantics, to prove that, at the age of thirty-six, he was capable of something more than academic reviews of his contemporaries. He also pursued the philosophies of Aristotle and Kant, Fichte and Schelling, Spinoza and the pre-Socratics, helped to develop what has since been canonized as "dialectic" (invented by the Greek philosophers and renewed by Kant and Fichte), and tried to portray his philosophy as "Science" (when what he proved was that philosophy is an art). But all of this, is not the point. (Is it worth reading Hegel if all he's doing is competing with Fichte and Schelling, whom we read, after all, only to understand Hegel better?)

The *Phenomenology* was first of all a child of its time. It was the announcement and the formal recognition of the new world. It was completed, so the story goes, on the very eve of Napoleon's decisive victory at Jena. This was no academic treatise, no ordinary philosophy book. It was consciously intended to be a *great* book, a prophetic work, full of enthusiasm and excitement, even if German academic prose and Hegel's intentionally obscure style now render this enthusiasm less than contagious. The *Phenomenology* reached far beyond the

confines of scholars to embrace what Hegel called “the spirit of the times,” the hopeful confusion of every peasant, craftsman, soldier, and businessman—in short, “humanity.” If it is a book that is often obscure in its references and perplexing in its organization—what else could be the self-consciously global expression of those confused and terrible times? Whatever the pretensions about “Science,” the *Phenomenology* was a very personal book, an attempt to understand and to make reasonable an unreasonable world. If it is an exercise in dialectical logic, it is anything but logical. If it pretends to be historical, it gives us everything but history. The *Phenomenology* is a grand and passionate vision, a conceptual symphony, the recognition of a new “spirit” which was coming to be and needed a sense of itself, through the auspices of philosophy. The *Phenomenology* is not to be compared so much to Aristotle or Kant as to Goethe’s *Faust*, or perhaps to Beethoven’s compositions of the same time and similar circumstances. It is great philosophy, but it is, first of all, a spiritual autobiography, a passionate confession, an enthusiastic encounter with “destiny.”

Fifteen years later, an older, established and more secure Professor Hegel, writing from his professorial chair in Berlin, would announce in the Preface to his *Philosophy of Right* that “When philosophy paints its grey on grey, the world is already old.” We can only conclude that the hopes and enthusiasms had died, that this was an expression of despair representative of the “reaction” that followed the fall of Napoleon and the failure of the Prussian reform movement. But to read that resignation back into the *Phenomenology* and to forget its hotbed historical context is to misunderstand its “spirit” entirely.

It is nearly two centuries later. That context is now only history; the names of the battlefields are Metro stops in Paris and have been replaced by a thousand or so scholarly investigations into lost causes and facts. But the *Phenomenology* is also a work of philosophy, and there is then that question, “What is living and what is dead in Hegel’s philosophy?” Napoleon is dead. So is Hegel. The text, however, is alive, brought to life no longer by the “spirit of the times” but by our reading of it, our thinking about it and its effects on us. Luis Borges has told us that we should always read a book as if it had been written today, and if this approach ignores the spirit that originally inspired the book, it nonetheless reminds us that we ourselves are now the life of that text. It is our renewed source of inspiration, a conceptual gateway to a new world, whether or not we choose to stay there. Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is still an example of the philosophical imagination at its finest, an invitation for us to allow ourselves to use it to our own

purposes, as philosophers confronting a philosopher, that is, *doing* philosophy in the spirit of Hegel himself.

I have tried to combine two equally necessary approaches to Hegel, either or both of which are often missing—to appreciate the historical and intellectual context which give sense to Hegel's expressions and concerns, so different from our own, but at the same time to restate at every turn the substance of the argument in our own terms, according to our own concerns, which would have been by the nature of the case inaccessible or unintelligible to Hegel in his own time.

The *Phenomenology* is not just a corpse for scholars, drained of its spirit and ready for dissection. It is not merely a document of its times, like the list of prisoners in the Bastille on July 14, 1789. It is not a problem of biography, to be traced to college courses, friends and rivalries, tensions, toilet training, and perhaps birth trauma. It is not a holy text, hiding a fixed meaning, the intentions of the author, the right interpretation. We cannot understand the book as Hegel did; a Marxist cannot read it in the same way as a Christian, and Hegel, even if we could ask him, might well not remember what he meant or what he said or why he said what he said. He wrote very quickly, carelessly, the kind of writing that feels inspired at three in the morning, a bottle of Rhine wine by one's side, but often becomes kindling for the fire the following afternoon. The book was written in less than a year—what commentary on it has been written so fast? It is filled with infelicities that would not have survived a second draft: mixed metaphors that are almost embarrassing and such unfortunate devices as “on the one hand, . . . on the other hand . . . and thirdly . . .” References are obscured, pronouns ambiguous, subordinate clauses left dangling, and worse, there are leaps in logic that on no account can be defended by the appeal to “speculative” thinking or the “subtlety” of Hegel's dialectic. There are schoolboy anecdotes slipped into the crevices of almost indecipherable arguments, and the overall structure of the book is so chaotic that it has been explained away by German scholars on the grounds that Hegel changed his mind in the middle of the book. (Which is, of course, a way of not having to deal with it as philosophy. The book then becomes an archaeological artifact.)

Too many excuses have been made for abominable philosophical prose, so let us just say outright: Hegel was a *horrible* writer. (His contemporary Jacobi commented on an unsigned essay: “I recognize the bad style.”) We can only smile at the enthusiasm of J. N. Findlay, for example, who comments that Hegel was a literary genius and the Preface of the *Phenomenology* a masterpiece. On the lighter side, the

book is filled with jokes, puns, wisecracks, sarcasm, parody, and all those ingredients which tend to make an academic work "not serious." But in no way does any of this mean that we should dismiss Hegel, as several generations of American philosophers have done; it means that we must read him as he insisted on reading the philosophers before him, with an appreciation for the historical and intellectual context within which we, but not he, can see his limitations, his blind spots and his less happy implications, recasting him in our own terms which, given what he sometimes seems to want to say, are better than his own. We can save him from his own language. Phrases like "the self-realization of Absolute Spirit" mean nothing to us, and any commentator who simply repeats such phrases is not even beginning to do his or her job. To read Hegel is to be bewildered, but also it is to insist—in our peculiarly vulgar and intransigent American way—on a tangible account of concrete and current concepts and images. If Hegel could not be taught to ordinary intelligent people, then I for one would not find reason to read him at all.

I have tried to write a book about Hegel which will serve both as an introduction to a fascinating but formidable subject and as an appropriately scholarly and somewhat polemical re-interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. Accordingly, the book falls into two somewhat unequal halves, the first aimed at non-philosophers and those readers unfamiliar with German philosophy and its cultural environment, the second intended for serious students of the *Phenomenology* who are interested in a detailed reading and interpretation of Hegel's various forms and transitions in his book. I have tried to include sufficient quotations from the original to spare readers the trouble of having to shift back and forth between text and commentary, but my intention nevertheless is to provide something of an independent narrative, "in the spirit of Hegel," which is not so much a commentary on someone else's book as an attempt to bring that book to life. I would see no reason to write a book about a book which is, as Charles Taylor describes Hegel's ontology, "quite dead."

The first three Chapters are an attempt to provide a relaxed, non-technical introduction to the cultural and intellectual climate in which Hegel wrote his great book. Chapter 1 is a broad stroke survey of the history and problems of Germany around 1800; Chapter 2 is a survey of German Idealism, beginning with Immanuel Kant and proceeding through Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling, with some brief mention of other figures influential at the time. I ask those readers who are more familiar with German cultural history or the history of phi-

losophy to bear with me during a much condensed tour for the uninitiated, or, better, to skip directly to Chapter 3 or 4 or 5. Chapter 3 is an account of younger Hegel (Hegel in his early thirties) before he wrote the *Phenomenology*. I have tried to capture the substance and the tone of his early writings which, though they may not be very important or interesting in themselves, serve to throw considerable illumination on the murkier intentions of the *Phenomenology*. In particular, I offer an unflattering and, to many scholars, unsympathetic view of Hegel's turn to professionalism, marked by his change of language and drastic increase in obscurity, in the years just before he began writing the book which concerns us. My intention, again, is to set the stage; it is not primarily to criticize Hegel (or, by implication, professionalized philosophy) so much as it is to cut through unnecessary obfuscation to discover the truly fascinating ideas expressed thereby.

Chapter 4 is an introduction to the *Phenomenology* itself, but it is also an over-all interpretation of the book, including a brief analysis of such central concepts as "the Absolute" and "Spirit." In the short initial section of the chapter, I describe the somewhat urgent circumstances surrounding the book's composition. In the second section I attempt to explain, as non-technically as possible, the over-all purpose of the *Phenomenology*, what Hegel was trying to do with his book. It is here, in particular, that I attempt to provide an analysis of such key concepts as "the Absolute" and "Spirit" and "necessity," although my treatment of these concepts here is inevitably incomplete and continues throughout the book. The third and last section of Chapter 4 is an attempt to unravel the extremely confused structure of the *Phenomenology*. I try to explain why it is so confused, but also why this should not worry us. Once more, my intention is to set the stage for a reading of the *Phenomenology* rather than to criticize Hegel (or his many interpreters). To read the *Phenomenology* with profit and pleasure is first of all to rid oneself of some of the expectations with which one usually approaches a book of philosophy.

The discussion of the text of the *Phenomenology* constitutes Part II, beginning with Chapter 6. I have set off Hegel's very difficult Preface with a separate commentary, at the end of Part I, because it is not so much an integral part of the *Phenomenology* but rather Hegel's own reflection about its over-all purpose and structure. Part II thus begins with a discussion of Hegel's Introduction, and the rest of the book follows the *Phenomenology* primarily according to subject-matter, not strictly according to the table of contents. Hegel's views about knowledge, for example, are to be found in chapters 1–3 and 5 of the *Phe-*

nomenology, with some extremely important suggestions in the opening pages of chapter 4. For reasons which I defend in the context of the discussion, I have analyzed these various chapters and sections in sequence, although they are not contiguous in the *Phenomenology* itself. I have tried to focus on themes rather than attempt a line by line commentary, but it should be evident that the former depends upon the latter, and I believe that the thematic approach makes the *Phenomenology* not only more accessible; it is also more faithful to the composition and texture of the book. In any case, my primary concern is Hegel's philosophy, and, unfortunately, this is too often obscured by the word play of the text.

In the interests of the narrative, I have tried to minimize my references to other scholars and commentators. Where I do disagree it is only to stress a point, and where I do not it is probably because I have been fortunate enough to have the benefit of their knowledge and opinions. I want to express an enormous sense of gratitude, for example, to such scholars as J.N. Findlay, without whom I never could have gotten started on Hegel. He will, no doubt, find much of what I say about Hegel disagreeable; nevertheless, his own efforts to render Hegel intelligible to the English-speaking philosophical world have made the current apotheosis of Hegel possible. I am similarly grateful to H.S. Harris, whose Hegel research has proven to be invaluable to anyone in the field. I am much obliged to the late Walter Kaufmann, whose own work on "the early Hegel" and whose attempts to find the humanist in Hegel so markedly influenced my own work. I owe, as always, a special debt of gratitude to Frithjof Bergmann, who got me interested in Hegel in the first place. I owe a multiple debt of gratitude to four scholars who visited the University of Texas in the winter of 1980 to participate in a semester-long seminar on Hegel's *Phenomenology*: Alasdair MacIntyre, James Ogilvy, Leo Rauch, and Charles Taylor. I have learned so much because of and from my students that I cannot possibly thank them all, but worthy of special mention are Julius Sensat, Tom Hanley, Harry O'Hara, Eric Santner, Randall Hickman, and John Leamons. I have profited greatly from seminars and discussions with Jim Schmidt, who also gave me the supererogatory benefit of his reading and criticism of my manuscript. Bill de Vries was immensely helpful in the chapters on Hegel's epistemology. I owe a very special acknowledgement to Jim Anderson, who encouraged me to write this book for Oxford and gave me so much help and advice during its ten-year gestation. My thanks too to Barbara Herbich for her energetic efforts during the final days of manuscript

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In the Spirit of Hegel

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Introduction

In the Spirit of Hegel

... what one generation has brought forward as knowledge and spiritual creation, the next generation inherits. This inheritance becomes its soul, its spiritual substance, something one has become accustomed to, its principles, its prejudices, its riches. ... And since each generation has its own spiritual activity and vitality, it works upon what it has received and the material thus worked upon becomes richer. Our position is the same: to grasp the knowledge at hand, appropriate it and mold it. —Hegel, Introduction to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

This is a book about a book, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Bamberg and Würzburg, 1807; hereafter referred to as the *Phenomenology* or *PG*).¹ It is not exactly a commentary, and certainly not an attempt to bring dead issues and obscure allusions to life by means of referring to other dead issues and obscure allusions to which they once referred. My intention is quite literally to re-do Hegel, to try to understand what is going on in this one great book, to recast and in many cases reformulate his arguments. Sometimes Hegel's arguments can best be explained by reference to his contemporaries, notably Fichte and Schelling, and to Kant, who had just died in 1804. Sometimes Hegel has to be recast in a more modern idiom, revealing insights into problems not yet well formulated. If I am not always faithful to the letter of Hegel's work, I hope it will be said that I have tried my best to understand him, and to re-create, in our terms, the *spirit* of his philosophy.

1. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a new translation by A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, 1977. I have also referred throughout to J.B. Baillie's once standard translation of 1910, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1931; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), and various partial translations, e.g. Walter Kaufmann's very good translation of the Preface (New York: Doubleday, 1966) and Kenley Dove's translations of the Introduction in Heidegger's *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) and final chapter (unpublished.) I have used the now standard German academic edition of the *Phänomenologie*, edited by J. Hoffmeister (F. Meiner: Hamburg, 1952). All references to Miller are *paragraph* numbers, not page numbers. Footnote references in the *Phenomenology* will also be abbreviated *PG*, starting in Chapter 4.

Hegel calls the truth of his *Phenomenology* a “bacchanalian revel”; it is, in other words, an orgy of ideas, a conceptual debauch. Elsewhere, the book is called a “labyrinth” and a “highway of despair”; it does appear to be a maze of obscure forms, linked together by whim, struggling to reach clarification by devious or impossible routes. But whether the metaphor is revelry or despair, one thing is certain; this great book greets its every reader, whatever his or her expectations, as an enormous challenge to both patience and intellect. First, there is a formidable Preface that begins with an explicit refusal to cooperate with the reader. Then, there is a score or so of topics that range from academic debates in the theory of knowledge to the French Revolution, from a parable of two people fighting for mutual recognition to a commentary on phrenology, from a mystical celebration of the family to a critique of Kant’s categorical imperative. There are references without names, pronouns without referents, a chorus of narrative voices that interweave as in a fugue and contradict one another—all arranged as if they were the result of a “bacchanalian” thinking spree, or, perhaps, of the despair of an author who has too much to say and finally throws his thoughts together in any order whatever. Defenders of Hegel who know the book well come to see its “logic” and take it for granted. (“One gets used to anything,” Camus’s mother used to say.) But the first thing that is needed, for anyone beginning Hegel or still less than comfortable with him, is a quick introduction, an interpretation, not necessarily the only one or the “right” one, but a philosophical handle, a way of proceeding.

The reader has a right to know which Hegel he is about to meet, the great rationalist metaphysician, the Christian apologist, the theological heretic, the philosopher of “the state,” the proto-radical predecessor of Marx, the super-professor of Berlin, an alienated theology student of Tübingen, the spokesman for the Absolute, or the precocious proponent of historical relativism for whom an idea is “true” only for its time. Every introduction is already an interpretation; a meeting of minds may nevertheless be full of mutual misunderstandings. But Hegel himself admits of multiple interpretations, and some of the least interesting among them, in fact, are those he provides for us himself.

*The Place of the Phenomenology:
Against Reading Hegel Backwards*

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. —Kierkegaard, *Journals*

Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to a much larger philosophical “system,” which begins more or less with his mammoth *Science of Logic*, written several years later (1812–16).² During the years in which he was thinking about and writing the *Phenomenology*, Hegel was also beginning a cycle of lectures which he would repeat with embellishments throughout his career, eventually to be published (in various versions) as his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1st ed., 1817).³ The easy inference, therefore, is to take Hegel at his word, and view the *Phenomenology* as the prelude or overture to his later work, and to suppose that its “spirit” is infected if not wholly determined by the professional ambitions he was clearly entertaining at the time.⁴ But that is not the Hegel who will appear in these pages, and not the *Phenomenology* either. Hegel at thirty-six, whatever his ambitions and whatever his original plans for his project, was alive with philosophy and uncertainty; he was daring and experimental rather than merely reflective, “speculative” in the best sense of that word, trying to understand a world in chaos. This is a quite different Hegel from the senior-professor at the University of Berlin who wrote of

2. *Wissenschaft der Logik; Science of Logic*. First part published in 1812 (Nürnberg), second part in 1816. Translated into English by W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers in 2 vols. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), and more recently by A.V. Miller in a single volume (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

3. *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences)* Published first in 1817 (Heidelberg). Completely revised (and twice as long) in 1827 and revised again in 1830. *The Encyclopaedia* has since been extensively edited by Rosenkranz (1845, 1878) and Lasson (1905, 1911) and Pöggeler (1959) to include extensive additions (*Zusätze*) based on Hegel's students' lecture notes. Now in three volumes of the collected works, translated into English by William Wallace (Part I: *The Logic of Hegel*, Oxford, 1874; rev. ed., 1892) and Part III: *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford, 1894); and more recently by A.V. Miller (Part II: *The Philosophy of Nature* (Oxford, 1970).

4. The relationship between the *Phenomenology* and Hegel's later work has been a perennial source of dispute in Germany, for example, by Pöggeler and Fulde; the common assumption has been that Hegel was first of all to be understood in terms of the “mature” philosopher of the “system,” to which the earlier work either did or did not stand in a coherent and preparatory relationship. See, for example, Otto Pöggeler, “Zur Deutung der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*” (1961), in *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Friburg-Munich, 1973) and Hans Friedrich Fulda and Dieter Henrich (eds.), *Materialien zu Hegels 'Phänomenologie des Geistes'* (Frankfurt, 1976) esp. Fulda's “Zur Logik der Phänomenologie,” pp. 391–425.

philosophy as “the owl of Minerva,” the great gray shadow that emerges only at twilight. (Walter Kaufmann, writing of the later Hegel [after forty] asks, “Whatever happened to him? We can answer that question in a single sentence: for eight long years the poor man was headmaster of a German secondary school.”⁵)

Hegel in 1806 was full of hope; his system had not yet become a habit, and the *Phenomenology* was not merely an introduction to anything, except, perhaps, a new philosophical vision of the world. The *Phenomenology* is a book unto itself, and if Hegel originally considered it to be the introduction to some larger systematic project he demonstrably got carried away with it. It was as if, to use the popular metaphor of the day, a “demon” took hold of Hegel as he was writing and inspired a work quite different from what he originally intended—indeed, a work far too radical for his (later) more conservative philosophical sensibilities. And not only did Hegel become more and more absorbed in the mad progression and transformation of forms he was inventing as he drew from every facet of his experience and his wide interest in history and the classics, but he quite obviously lost sight of his future plans, at least for some time, as if to catch his breath and look around to see where he had gone only when he had finished his frenetic journey, when he finally (under duress from his publisher) sat down, still in a frenzy, to summarize it all in the Preface.

When Hegel later moved on, he looked back to the *Phenomenology* only rarely, a fact to be viewed with surprise if indeed it was the *Phenomenology* that set up the entire later enterprise. Consider the enormous number of self-congratulatory references in Kant’s subsequent works to his ground-breaking first *Critique*, by way of a contrast. Hegel refers to his book infrequently, talks about it more than modestly, and when he introduces sections in the *Logic* and *Encyclopaedia* entitled “Phenomenology,” there is shockingly little reference to the *Phenomenology* even when he snatches entire topics and sections from it to be inserted in the later “system.”⁶ The conclusion I draw from this

5. Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Re-Interpretation* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1966), p. 186.

6. For example, in the later *Encyclopaedia*, Part III, where the strategy of the *Phenomenology* is more or less repeated in the middle section called “Consciousness” in the 1817 edition (which breaks down into the same three parts as the *Phenomenology*, “Consciousness as such, Self-Consciousness, and Reason”), but the word “phenomenology” is used only to refer loosely to consciousness as “the subject of the phenomenology of the Spirit.” In the second edition the word “Phenomenology” replaces “Consciousness” as the title of the section, but it is not until the third edition that the phrase “the Phenomenology of Spirit” actually appears in the title, and then sandwiched in between “Anthropology” and “Psychology,” making it quite clear that, by this time, the *Phenomenology* is neither the essential beginning nor the high point of Hegel’s philosophy, but

is that the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* and the *Phenomenology* itself are quite distinct from, perhaps even an embarrassment to, the older Hegel of the "system" and the "system" itself. The *Phenomenology* is not an introduction. If anything, Hegel's problem was, to borrow an apt expression from Richard Rorty: What could he possibly do after the *Phenomenology* as an encore?⁷

Hegel as Humanist

One may have all sorts of ideas about the Kingdom of God; but it is always a realm of spirit to be realized and brought about in man.
—Hegel, *Reason in History*

The single most important interpretative guideline I can offer is that the Hegel we will meet in these pages is a strict *humanist*. I use this term in its predominantly 19th-century context. Hegel is a strictly secular, virulently anti-theological, and more or less anti-Christian philosopher, not at all the Christian apologist or the theological heretic he has so often been made out to be in traditional German and English interpretations.⁸ I see Hegel as the heir to the French and German Enlightenments, though heavily influenced by what we (not he) would call "romanticism." Hegel's romanticism is most evident in his over-all goal for philosophy—a sense of total harmony with the world, a sense of unity that, it seems, one may have known as a child, and then lost. But it is an essentially *secular* harmony, a sense of being "at home in the world."⁹ Hegel sees religion in the service of humanity, not humanity in the service of God; he sees God (insofar as we

just another discipline of "the subjective spirit." Imagine Kant, by way of contrast, reducing the matter of his first great *Critique of Pure Reason* to a middle chapter of some summary work, and without even referring to the original work by name.

7. Richard Rorty, in a Symposium on Jacques Derrida, at the American Philosophical Association meetings in December 1978.

8. For example, see the collection of essays published together in Darrell Christian-sen's *Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (The Hague, 1970). A particularly lively discussion of Hegel's "heresies" is still J.M.E. McTaggart's *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901).

9. The best single discussion of the "romantic" side of Hegel is M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971). An analysis of the *Phenomenology*, in terms of this romantic metaphor of "alienation and reintegration," occupies a central section of chap. 4, and is compared with Hölderlin's *Hyperion* and Goethe's *Faust*. It is worth anticipating, however, that the theme of "harmony" and integration is not exclusive to Romanticism; it also defines the goal of neo-classicism and, in such works as *Hyperion* as well as Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the two movements are not always easily distinguished.

should use that word at all) as nothing more than human spirit writ large, or what Hegel calls *Geist*.¹⁰ Thus, I could not be more in disagreement with Charles Taylor, otherwise a kindred spirit, who continually makes humanity into a “vehicle” for Hegel’s *Geist*, always a part of something “greater than itself.”¹¹

I say that Hegel is, as a humanist, “more or less” anti-Christian because, since Christianity for Hegel meant Lutheranism, and since many of the theological doctrines he learned in the seminary were of the self-consciously modern and “enlightened” neo-Kantian variety, the lines of rebellion are never clearly drawn. Hegel used the standard theological vocabulary even when his meaning was entirely different, for example, in his use of the language of the Trinity and “incarnation” and even the words “religion” and “Christianity.” He was steeped in theology at the Tübingen seminary, but yet referred to his studies contemptuously as “old sourdough.” His early “anti-theological writings”¹² are very much in the Kantian mode, the underlying thesis being that religion is (only) a function and vehicle of morality and what might blandly be called “being a good person,” and that it has no other reason or justification. But yet, all the old concepts are still there—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, redemption, salvation, the Fall, the old myths and legends. One might too easily join the vast array of English and German commentators from Ster-

10. There is a now standard dilemma regarding the translation of *Geist*: “spirit” or “mind.” The former is loaded with religious imagery, the latter sounds too much the epistemological construct of the British empiricists. Current scholarship favors “spirit,” and I shall always use that translation here.

11. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976) and *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979). Since I will be critical of Taylor’s interpretation, perhaps I should say at the outset that I have found Taylor’s work extremely provocative and pedagogically very useful. My criticism is Taylor’s uncritical acceptance of *Geist*, or Spirit, in Hegel as something other than or greater than the human spirit. This may be true of Schelling, in his later works, and it accurately characterizes the poetic image Hölderlin expresses in his poetry toward the end of the century, but it does not take into account the systematic equivocation of Hegel’s language. My own interpretation, of course, is also an attempt to resolve that equivocation by pushing it toward the humanist side, which has the decided advantage, in addition to clarity and coherence in explaining the structure of Hegel’s work, of rendering Hegel’s philosophy quite alive, as opposed to “quite dead,” as Taylor finds it. He says, “no one can believe Hegel’s ontology, namely that the Universe is spirit positing itself as a matter of rational necessity.” I do not believe that Hegel believed that either, but rather a series of theses far more comprehensible and believable. That is what I shall try to establish here.

12. The “anti-theological writings” (so designated by Walter Kaufmann in his *Hegel* and in his “Hegel’s Early Anti-Theological Phase” (*Philosophical Review*, Oct. 1951 (LX.4)) were originally unearthed by Wilhelm Dilthey and published by Hermann Nohl as *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1907), and translated by T.M. Knox as *Hegel’s Early Theological Writings* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948). The first of these essays is translated by H.S. Harris, in his *Hegel’s Development: Towards the Sunlight 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), who also provides an extensive anti-anti-theological interpretation of all of these essays.

ling and Haym to Findlay and (Werner) Marx in finding in Hegel and his *Phenomenology* a revision of the old-time religion, updated in spirit but still tied to the old letter. But I propose another Hegel, a more French Hegel, perhaps—in tune with (the older) Voltaire, Kojève, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, despite the web of obscuring terminology from German Enlightenment theology. The *Phenomenology* is a grand treatise in cosmic humanism; humanity is everything, in the guise of *Geist*, or “Spirit,” and the purpose of Hegel’s philosophy is to get us to appreciate ourselves as a unity, as all-embracing humanity, and bring about the “self-realization of Spirit.” The spirit of Hegel, despite the letter, is completely opposed to what Nietzsche called “the other-worldly” sentiments of Christianity, whether in its antiquated incarnation as cultish martyrdom or its more modern Kantian emphasis on religion as the “practical postulate” of reason and morality. Hegel’s “Spirit” is human spirit, and if it includes much more than just humanity (namely, everything), it is, nonetheless, a belligerently humanist demonstration that this is a human world in which all is but a stage for our own self-realization.¹³

Hegel as Anti-Metaphysician, Anti-Epistemologist

There are no facts; only interpretations. —Nietzsche

In his now classic but deservedly ignored book on Hegel,¹⁴ Walter Stace proclaims with great irony that Hegel and his cronies were self-

13. The humanist interpretation of Hegel has been defended primarily by the Marxists, as well as by the existentialists. (Often, as in the case of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the two coincide.) Kojève gives Hegel a decidedly atheistic and intently political twist, and Georg Lukacs, in his long, sometimes brilliant, often vituperative discussion of the writings up to and including the *Phenomenology* (*The Young Hegel*, trans. R. Livingston (London, 1975); originally published as *Der Junge Hegel* in 1948), emphasized the influence of the British political economists far more than youthful religious influences and constraints. The Frankfurt School also emphasized Hegel’s humanism in what is sometimes an extensive interweaving of Hegel and Marx—notably, Herbert Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon, 1941) and, more recently, in the work of Jürgen Habermas (e.g. *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971)), discussed by Thomas McCarthy in his *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1978). But in America and England, largely under the influence of Findlay, who is obviously still under the influence of the older British Hegelians, Hegel has retained an almost uniform religious and more-than-human image. Charles Taylor provides the latest and the best version of that image, but one can note at least qualified exceptions: for instance, Raymond Plant’s *Hegel* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), which again takes Hegel to be primarily a political figure rather than a Lutheran revisionist; and in Jacob Loewenberg’s playful dialogue, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: Dialogues on the Life of the Mind* (La Salle: Open Court, 1965), from which a distinctively humanist and human Hegel emerges.

14. Walter Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel: A Systematic Exposition* (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 43.

declared metaphysicians who, despite their reading and supposed allegiance to Kant, “formed a sort of triumphal procession, proceeding, so to speak, with bands playing and flags waving . . . to occupy the citadel of reality itself.” And this has continued to be the popular view of Hegel among the positivistically inclined, that Hegel and his “cronies” ignored Kant completely and made ever more extravagant claims on the basis of metaphysics Kant had proven impossible. The charge is wholly unfounded, and it is Stace’s insistence on interpreting most of Hegel as a repetition of the problems of the pre-Socratics, when philosophy was indeed nothing but metaphysics, dimly understood, that is partly responsible for the post-metaphysical eclipse of Hegel. (A modern version of the same model has been argued with far more scholarship and sensitivity to Hegel by Stanley Rosen.¹⁵) But Hegel is not a metaphysician who ignored Kant’s objections. Indeed, the truth seems to be more on the other side, than Kant is, in Hegel’s view, far too caught up in traditional metaphysics, with his insistence on an unknown X beyond all human experience, a world “in itself” which is not a possible object of knowledge. It is Hegel who is the great anti-metaphysician, purging philosophy of every vestige of “the thing-in-itself,” the world behind, or beyond, the scenes. It is Hegel who reduced all questions of *being* (or ontology) to questions about the structures and forms of human experience, and he did so not by going back to the ancients but by carrying modern philosophy—that is, Kantian philosophy—to its logical and radical conclusions. To say that Hegel is an *idealist* is to say that, at every turn, he argues that the world is thoroughly *knowable*, and it is nothing “beyond” the realm of conscious experience.

The traditional idea that the *Phenomenology* is a book in metaphysics, a lesson in how the world *really* is, culminating in the ultimate ontological assurance—“the Absolute”—seems to me the very antithesis

15. Stanley Rosen, *G.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to His Science of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974). This is an intelligent but reactionary book, which quite explicitly renders Hegel an extremely elitist and effete philosopher, primarily a philosopher of logic who has been ignored or misunderstood by virtually every philosopher since, but who might now be understood—“if philosophy is to survive”—by a few. There is nearly total rejection of all those influences that might have made Hegel into a human being: childhood fears and adolescent concerns, having grown up in a particular society and a particularly exciting and uncertain time, having read authors like Rousseau not with an eye to the Absolute but with a very real concern for himself, his place in society and the future of what he saw, from his provincial standpoint, as “humanity.” Rosen highlights and celebrates what I find Hegel’s most objectionable thesis, “that the highest human satisfaction . . . is in thinking” (p. 31), and interprets his philosophical enterprise, in which the *Phenomenology* can be understood only in terms of the *Logic*, as the attempt to solve a series of ontological puzzles left unresolved by the ancient Greeks.

esis of the spirit of Hegel. Whatever his belated ontological assurances, obscured by metaphors and his own uncertainties, the *Phenomenology* is a book whose whole point is the *rejection* of dogmatic metaphysics, a book far more in tune with the spirit of the logical positivists and the more modern pragmatism of W. V. O. Quine than the ontological speculations of Leibniz and Christian Wolff. Hegel rejects the very idea of a single world-view, and though he does indeed give us what he considers to be the "best" world-view, it is rather a meta-view, a view about the correctness of views, rather than a view as such. There is no "reality" beyond human experience, and no set reality within human experience—*à la* Kant—which our concepts and judgments must conform to. There is just this—*experience*, and the business of philosophy is to describe this, in an all-encompassing way, to make sense of it, to recognize what it is and why it has come to be this way. (The working title of Hegel's book was "The Science of the Experience of Consciousness.")

This might well lead us to the conclusion that Hegel is best considered as an epistemologist. Indeed, I would argue that he can be viewed fruitfully in a way that has often been neglected, as a philosopher following the tradition and paradoxes from Locke to Hume to Kant and Fichte, all beginning with Descartes, concerned with the nature of knowledge and the relationship between our experience and reality. But, in another sense, Hegel is firmly opposed to precisely this tradition and its paradoxes, and he rejects the duality of experience and reality which lies at its foundations. In this, of course, he follows Kant and Fichte, though he goes further than they do. He rejects the epistemological problems that emerge in modern philosophy with what Richard Rorty calls "the invention of the mind" in the 17th century—the idea of "consciousness" as "mirror of the world" and the radical distinction between experience "inside" and reality "out there" ("the external world"). Therefore, one should probably conclude, insofar as this dualistic metaphor and the problems it entails have all but defined "epistemology," that Hegel is no epistemologist. What he is, one can say unobjectionably, is a "phenomenologist." He tells us that in his very title. But what this means, a century before Edmund Husserl appropriated the word as if it were his own invention, remains to be seen.¹⁶

16. Husserl's own view of Hegel is largely unlearned and a wholly unjustified prejudice. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he saw Hegel through Dilthey's eyes, as a historical relativist of sorts, but nevertheless his sometimes harsh dismissals are ill-considered, given the often striking connections between the two "phenomenologies."

Phenomenology: The Science of Experience

Experience is what allows you to recognize a mistake when you make it again. —Earl Wilson

Phenomenology (the word Hegel borrowed from Herder and Kant, among others) is the “study of phenomena,” the systematic description of experience, trying to make sense of it and showing it to have a certain “necessity,” that is, to have certain *reasons* for being as it is. This will strike many readers as a peculiar locution; more peculiar still is the German Idealist understanding of the need for “reasons,” which includes not only the description of the order and structure of our experience but something like a justification of our experience in terms of certain *purposes*. Phenomenology here is to be distinguished from those forms of explanation that try to go “behind” experience, for example, with neurophysiology and a causal theory of perception (Locke), or by explaining the whole of our experience as caused by God (Berkeley), or, fancifully, by an Evil Genius (Descartes). The business of phenomenology, to the contrary, is to provide us with the basic rules governing our experience and, for Hegel, to show us the purpose of experience, to show us what conceptions of experience are superior and better fit this purpose.¹⁷

It should be evident that the notion of “experience” employed here is a more glamorous notion than one finds in most philosophers, for instance, in the British Empiricists and even in Kant. Too often, philosophers reduce experience to the passive reception of sensations or, in Kant for instance, to the limited world of observation and knowledge. But for Hegel, it is essential to experience that we are *participants*, not just observers, that we are *active* not only as understanding beings who interpret the world through our concepts (as in Kant, again) but also as living, desiring, energetic, insecure, ambitious beings for whom experience is as much *adventure* as scientific observation

For a good discussion of this, see Quentin Lauer, “Hegel and Husserl” in *Essays in Hegelian Dialectic* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1977).

17. The concept of “purpose of experience” will seem odd to the modern reader but it would have been commonplace in the context in which Hegel uses it. It was from Hölderlin, most immediately, that he formed his sense of the “necessity” of certain experiences. A more familiar way of talking about this would be our own rationalizations of uncomfortable or traumatic experiences in terms of “having learned something from them” or “having grown wiser on the basis of them”; perhaps “necessity” is too strong a word for this sense of having gotten something out of our suffering, and “purpose” makes it look too much as if we consciously *chose* to suffer; but Hegel in fact believed something like this, following Fichte, and “the purpose of experience,” for the post-Kantian idealists, often refers to this somewhat *machismo* conception of “putting oneself through something” in order to educate oneself and in some sense “grow” from it. Cf. Nietzsche: “That which does not overcome me makes me stronger.”

and as much *action* as knowledge. (This is the inheritance of Fichte.) Contemporary analytic philosophers sometimes look with suspicion on the notion of "experience," either because it is too technical and restricted (as in "sense data" or "raw experience") or too dualistic and mysterious (as in "the realm of experience" or "the field of consciousness"). But the concept of experience that we find in Hegel is in fact much more like the familiar notion captured in the expletive "What an experience!" or the qualification of "having experience" (in a career or in sex, for example). It does not mean the minimal input of the senses; it does not refer to some "inner" world. It refers rather to those particularly definitive and memorable episodes which throw into high relief the outlines of our lives. Indeed, if we would look for a similar concept of experience we would find it not in classical epistemology but in the much more practical-minded writings of the American pragmatists William James and John Dewey. For them, experience meant our active participation as well as reflection in the world. It did not refer to some curious "inner" phenomenon whose nature and existence were obscure; it referred to our very manner of consciously living, our way of not only looking at but being in the world. To ask for the rules and reasons governing our experience is therefore to ask why we live and think about our lives as we do. And to ask for the purpose of experience is, in effect, to ask the much more dramatic set of questions which are usually summarized as "the meaning of life."

The idea of making sense of experience, of course, might be said to be the center of the philosophical enterprise since and well before the first Greek philosophers. What changes with Descartes is the importance of the idea of "experience" itself, and what changes with Kant is that the enterprise is no longer ontological, no longer concerned with the "true nature of things" so much as with what Kant called "the necessary conditions for any possible experience." This is an all-important phrase; it came to rule philosophy for years after Kant. It takes but a moment's reflection, however, to see that the notion "necessary conditions of possible experience" is fraught with ambiguities. *Whose* possible experience? The experiences of European intellectuals? Human beings everywhere? Dogs? Bees? Fictional Venutians? Schizophrenics? If one defines the scope of "possible experience" narrowly enough, the "conditions" will be nothing other than the structure of our actual experiences; if one construes "possible experience" very broadly—let us say, to include the whole of conscious creation and God too—then the "conditions" would seem to be wholly indeterminate. One way of staking out the monumental step that He-

gel takes beyond Kant is to say that Kant takes an extremely narrow view of what constitutes “possible experience” and thus emerges with an extremely rigid and limited set of “conditions” or “rules” for experience. Hegel takes an extremely broad and generous view of “possible experience” and so comes to recognize, as Kant did not, the enormous variety of possible forms of experience (or “forms of consciousness,” *Gestalten des Bewusstseins*¹⁸) and the various “conditions” which make them possible. And this means, in turn, that Hegel’s problem—how to order and evaluate these different forms of experience—is one that did not arise for Kant.

A second ambiguity in Kant’s key phrase is the notion of “necessary conditions”; “necessary” in what sense? Not, Kant insisted, *causally* necessary (in the sense that a necessary condition for vision is a working retina and optic nerve). Not, Kant insisted, any conditions outside of experience (for example, the real existence of objects beyond experience which would cause us to have experiences), for we could never come to know these. “Necessary conditions,” according to Kant, were those presuppositions that could be logically *deduced* from the nature of our actual experience. But it is revealing that this most brilliant of modern philosophers, when he attempted this “transcendental deduction” in his great *Critique of Pure Reason*, failed to provide an argument that even looked like a logical deduction—and scholars have been fighting over what he actually did provide ever since. The conclusion, one might suspect, is that the search for “necessity”—making sense of experience—was not to be found in the realm of logical presuppositions either.¹⁹

What makes a form of experience “necessary,” according to Hegel, is not to be found in its causal pre-conditions or logical presuppositions, but in the nature of consciousness itself and also in the *context* in which it finds itself. Contrasts in context may render very different ideas “necessary.” In a society in which there is fragmentation and chaos, the ideal of harmony will seem “necessary,” which does not mean that it follows from chaos or that chaos inevitably causes a long-

18. “*Gestalten des Bewusstseins*” is erratically translated by Miller as “shapes” and “patterns” as well as “forms” (e.g. *Phenomenology*, 13,29,89). I will use “forms” throughout wherever Hegel uses “*Gestalten*.”

19. Scores of commentators, particularly in Britain, have insisted on continuing to look for such “deductions” in Hegel, and when they do not find them wrongly conclude that Hegel failed, when in fact he never tried. Thus, Charles Taylor complains about Hegel’s “loose” arguments, and J. N. Findlay utters cries of despair every few sections. Walter Kaufmann, challenging Hegel, asks, “Did Egyptian religion ‘presuppose’ the Enlightenment, . . . the events of 1789”? Kaufmann explains the absurdity here by appealing to Hegel’s “immense strain.” A more plausible explanation is that he was not trying to deduce “presuppositions” at all.

ing for harmony. In a society that has just been through the turmoil of a radical revolution, reactionary ideas become “necessary,” just as, in a society that has too long been ruled by a corrupt *ancien régime*, revolutionary ideas become “necessary.” In philosophy, extravagant idealism is typically followed by a hard-headed realism, which seems a “necessary” corrective, and a too-strict rule-governed moral code is “necessarily” followed by a more feeling-centered, “intuitional” ethics. One could, with minor effort, turn each of these claims into a straight-forward causal hypothesis. But this is not what Hegel has in mind. The “necessity” in each of the above transitions is retrospective; looking *back* at the context, one understands it. At the time, it may have seemed wholly “irrational,” but now, we can appreciate its reasons. But what is also presupposed in this form of explanation (which is *not* to say that it is presupposed as a logical inference) is that we understand that there is some aim, some goal, some ideal, some *purpose*, toward which these ideas are striving. Hegel, in other words, insists that ideas are not just *products* of the times but ways of *dealing* with the times, a way of *accomplishing* something, and this all-present ambition, in a word, is to *comprehend* (*begreifen*) with its instrument, conceptual understanding (“the Concept,” *der Begriff*).²⁰ We literally want to *grasp* (“prehend”) the world, and not only through scientific understanding.

An idea or a form of experience is “necessary” insofar as it constitutes (what seems to be) a move in the direction of making sense of the world, comprehending it in one grand and all-inclusive picture. But this in turn raises another complication of gigantic proportions. Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is not so much about experience as it is about *changes* in experience, changes in the *forms* of experience, transformations of the *concepts* through which we give form to our experience. Total and unified comprehension is the principle behind this series of changes and transformations, but this is not *Hegel’s* principle; it is rather *the* principle or goal intrinsic to all human experience and, in particular, what defines *reason* (which Hegel sometimes defines as “the search for unity”). Consciousness will ideally opt for the more comprehensive and coherent account of experience, but also taking

20. “The Concept” is Hegelian shorthand for conceptual articulation in general. Sometimes, the word refers to a specific concept, for example, the conception one has of oneself as, let us say, a student or a professional or a thief. In its more grandiose usage, “the Concept” refers to our conceptual facilities in general, much as Kant talks about “the Categories” or “the Understanding” in general. But, making matters more confusing, Hegel also sometimes uses the phrase “the Concept” to refer to one particular all-embracing conception, namely, the conception which he defends as the absolute unity of human experience, or what he elsewhere refers to as “Spirit” and as “the Absolute.”

into account the particular circumstances that give it particular form. The botanical metaphor helps here: A plant will grow into a certain shape and size because of its genetic structure—its “internal principle,” but only if the conditions—air, water, soil, sunlight—are adequate. There is no logical guarantee that it will do so, however, and Hegel similarly believes that the development of the universe depends on the contingencies of context and conditions—which need not all be ideas or in any sense philosophical.

Two Hegels

The sun is new every day. —Heraclitus

As a philosopher of *change*, Hegel's prototype is not Kant but the pre-Socratic Heraclitus, the philosopher of the dancing flame, who taught that only change was real, even if the change followed an underlying logic or *logos* we might not understand. But here we begin to see the possibility of a deep tension in Hegel's philosophy; on the one hand, he is a philosopher whose main claim is to give us a unified all-inclusive world-view, which he calls “the Absolute.” On the other hand, he is the philosopher of change, the phenomenologist of forms, who appreciates, as Kant and most philosophers did not, the rich variety of forms of experience and the complex transformations between them. But this means that Hegel is no mere phenomenologist, providing us with a detailed description or an encyclopedia of conceptual forms; he is also a *dialectician*, for whom the *transitions* between those forms are at least as important as the forms themselves.²¹ But insofar as he wants to provide us with a single and, he would add, eternal view of a unified cosmos—“the Absolute,” Hegel has to minimize the ultimate reality of differences and of change; insofar as he stresses the differences and change he has to deny or at least postpone indefinitely the Absolute. And indeed, what we will find in the *Phenomenology* will be two different Hegels, confronting each other. The first Hegel is the more orthodox, academic Hegel, the post-Kantian phenomenologist

21. In a provocative article on “Hegel as Phenomenologist,” Kenley Dove opposes Hegel's phenomenologizing to his standard image as a dialectician, defending the first and rejecting the second. In the contemporary viewpoint of phenomenology *à la* Husserl, this may be defensible, but in Hegel, I shall argue, the two are inseparable. Dove's essay is published in Warren E. Steinkraus (ed.), *New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

whose business it is to establish “the Absolute”—a single all-embracing system of philosophy that will bring that discipline to its conclusion, if not to an end.²² (Hegel is not the first German philosopher to want to put his profession out of business, of course—nor will he be the last.) That, this Hegel says, is not only the explicit goal of philosophy, but the intrinsic desire of human consciousness as such. But the second Hegel is a much more radical Hegel, a “historicist”²³ Hegel who sees that the “necessary” movement and transformation of the forms of experience need not be going anywhere in particular and need not have a reachable goal—in order to have a goal. (One can reach for the moon, and try to love “forever.”) One can feel the need to move on without believing that one will eventually reach a state where there is no longer any reason to move. But because these various moves are all ways of conceiving of the world, and there is no end to them, and because there is no world apart from our various conceptions of it, what would follow from this is that *there is no way the world is*. There is no single and eternal view of the cosmos. There is no final description, no end of philosophy.²⁴

In his later years Hegel remembered his early works only in terms of the first Hegel, Hegel the absolute idealist, who in the *Phenomenology* established the groundwork for his future professional enterprises and established himself as *the* philosopher in Germany, after Kant. Accordingly, most traditional Hegel scholars have taken Hegel at his word and read the *Phenomenology* as a work on “the Absolute,” as another self-congratulatory contribution to the age-old attempt to end philosophy with a single definitive statement, to solve all the

22. In 1802, Hegel entitles his review of Gottlob Ernst Schulze: “Outbreak of Popular Joy over the Destruction at Long Last of Philosophy” (*Critical Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 1).

23. Hegel never applied the word “historicist” to himself. Indeed, he used the word as a term of abuse against Karl Leonard Reinhold in 1801, “so many mummies in a museum.” The word “historicism” has been applied to Hegel with a meaning wholly at odds with his own usage, e.g. by Karl Popper, but insofar as Hegel was a historicist in any significant sense, it was not the way in which he ever thought of himself or his philosophy.

24. Whether Hegel ever believed this is still a matter of debate. Clearly, he did not believe that he had ended philosophy in the *Phenomenology*, for he was just anticipating what he thought he was going to do. But even in his Berlin Lectures on the History of Philosophy, he ends with an admonition to his students: “It is my desire that this history of Philosophy should contain for you a summons to grasp the *spirit of the time*, which is present in us by nature” (my emphasis), but then, “it has been a source of pleasure to myself to have been associated with you in this spiritual community; I ought not to speak of it as if it were a thing of the past, for I hope that a spiritual bond has been knit between us which will prove permanent” (March 26, 1830, in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. by E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1955), volume 3, pp. 553–54).

problems and lay bare *the* structure of the cosmos, the nature of *the* human mind.²⁵

In this book, I want to emphasize the second Hegel, the Heraclitan Hegel, the Hegel of endless change, and what he calls “the bad infinity,” running on without end. This is the Hegel who said, in effect, that there is no unity except through differences and there is no end to philosophy. Scholars have sometimes explained away this second Hegel by appeal to the great confusion and discontinuity of the text of the *Phenomenology* and the pressure under which Hegel wrote it. But this scholarly appeal conflates the contingency of the cause with the brilliance of the effect, like explaining away the drug-induced cosmic visions of a Yaqui Indian by referring only to the brown powder that is its cause. What is discontinuous in Hegel’s text is not just the text itself, but the whole of human history, for it is Hegel who sees, or begins to see, that it is the *process* of thought that is everything; its results are only part of the process, and the final result—“the Absolute”—is an illusion. For the second Hegel—the Hegel I want to celebrate here (while giving due time to the first, more orthodox Hegel)—the Absolute is only the distant goal, never to be reached, or else, if one does reach it, it will turn out to be—as in the *Wizard of Oz*—the motivation for a grand and dangerous journey, the all-impressive vision of the final solution, only to find, once one gets there, a fraud, or at most, just another stage on the journey.²⁶ Or, as Alasdair MacIntyre has said of the Absolute, *à la* Stein, “There is no *there* there.”²⁷

Hegel’s Politics

The picture of the state as a product of his own energies, has disappeared from the citizen’s soul. —“The Positivity of the Christian Religion” (1795)

Philosophers and political scientists who reject, ignore, minimize, or reduce to a few dense paragraphs of paraphrase the whole of Hegel’s alleged “ontology” often tend to do so in order to emphasize his political philosophy, which was in turn neglected or rendered prepos-

25. I have discussed and criticized this general sense of European philosophical congratulation in my *History and Human Nature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) under the general heading, “the transcendental pretense.”

26. The image is from Michael Murray, at Vassar College.

27. In seminars on the *Phenomenology* at the University of Texas, February 4, 1980.

terously conservative (or worse) by those traditional scholars who treated Hegel as a great if heretical Christian metaphysician, unconcerned with such worldly questions. On the latter view, the *Philosophy of Right* appears as an afterthought, a distraction; and Hegel's many other political writings—some of them unpublished—and his political lectures to his students, from 1805 until his death, are simply ignored. On the former view, however, these other writings and Hegel's vigorous treatment of the state in the *Philosophy of Right* receive central treatment, and the *Phenomenology* is interpreted accordingly, as an abstract and obscure political text.²⁸ But the *Phenomenology* is virtually devoid of political topics.

Hegel, like all of his contemporaries, had rather strong if continuously changing political views. He was an impressionable youth when the French Revolution began across the border (he was then only 19). His unabashed liberalism took a shock as the revolution turned to terror (when he was 22); he was relieved, if confused, when France was consolidated under Napoleon (Hegel was 29). Napoleon crowned himself emperor (Hegel was 33), became the invader (37), an autocrat (40), desperate (44), and finished at Waterloo (45). For the bulk of Hegel's professional career in the Prussian capital at the University of Berlin, there was the reactionary lull following the Treaty of Vienna, which was particularly disadvantageous to the smaller German states. While Hegel ruled the philosophical roost in Berlin, the government came down hard on students and every sign of "free-thinking" in the universities. This was the period of Metternich, the crushing of liberalism, rigid control of the press and education in general, broken promises for reform, secret societies, omnipresent police surveillance, culminating in a series of revolutions across Europe in 1830–31 put down by Metternich, whose influence was slowly corroded by the beginnings of the industrial revolution and rise of the German bourgeoisie and working class. The economic liberalism which Hegel had studied with enthusiasm as a young man began to catch hold in Germany, but only after Hegel's death in 1831.

Hegel had been politically enthusiastic (though surely not "active" or "involved") as a student. In 1802 he wrote an essay on "the German constitution," and the following year he wrote an essay on "natural law," a reply to an essay on the same topic by Fichte and a subject of wide interest among young intellectuals at the time. While he was writing the *Phenomenology* he lectured on the State and the nature of

28. For example, Judith Shklar's treatment in her *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976).

society to his students, and so, at least as background, it makes more than good sense to suppose that there are political motifs in the *Phenomenology*, explicitly or not. Yes and no. On the one hand, there is virtually no discussion whatsoever of the State, private property, individual rights and justice, or any of the other topics that, at the very minimum, constitute a discussion of political philosophy. Whatever his interests in practical politics or even abstract political concepts, these were always secondary in Hegel's mind to interests broadly conceived as "philosophical." These might include some abstract speculations on the Roman conception of individual rights or the status of private property as a subject for Kantian moral deliberations. But, in the *Phenomenology* at least, these are by no means central and not as such political questions at all. Hegel was not primarily a political philosopher, and to view him as a political theorist and a philosopher of the State is to look at him through a strained perspective which he would not, at any point in his career, have recognized.²⁹

On the other hand, one could argue that it is a political dilemma that inspires Hegel's whole phenomenological enterprise. Metaphysicians might refer to it as the pre-Socratic problem of "the One and the Many," but to so summarize Hegel makes as much sense as to summarize the complex history of the Hebrews as a battle against polytheism. Indeed, Hegel's central problem in the *Phenomenology* is to show how there can be some unity in the wide variety of customs, cultures, and conceptual world-views he describes, some of them drawn from his own immediate experiences and those of his contemporaries, some of them drawn from his extensive knowledge of the classics and antiquity, and some an invention or a collage of experiences drawn from novels, history, philosophical theories, and the popular wisdom of the time. Hegel's sense of urgency with regard to this central problem of unity and variety, identity and differences, can best be understood through an appreciation of his own position, as a Protestant German growing up near the border of France in a predominantly Catholic province, watching the new world of the Enlightenment with its stress on the singular concept of *humanity* infiltrate the very diverse cultures of Europe. Indeed, this imperialistic sense of universality was what prompted the German "folk"-philosopher Johann Herder to turn against the Enlightenment and preach instead the virtues of cultural differences. And as Hegel struggled with his German sensibilities, which

29. Taylor, for example, views "what is living" in Hegel as his political vision. Raymond Plant also views him this way, and so does Anthony Quinton in a long two-part review of recent Hegel literature in *The New York Review of Books*, "Spreading Hegel's Wings" (May 29, June 12, 1975; in two parts, Vol. 22).

he often weighed against the very different sensibilities of the French, the Italians, the British, and others, he found himself face to face with history, Napoleon, the internationalism of the Enlightenment, and the budding wishful nationalism of Germany.

Hegel is not political, perhaps, but he is nevertheless a young man with his eyes on the traumatic changes wrought on a society that is torn between its own archaic traditions and the overwhelming forces of modernism. This is the personal sense of the *Phenomenology*. It is that sense that an individual is of significance not just because he or she is "human," but because of an identification with a community, a culture. And yet, in the last analysis, we do identify with the whole of humanity and, waxing momentarily cosmological, the Universe itself. But this is the trauma of the *Phenomenology*, and the source of its complexity—an incoherence of monumental proportions. Here is the personal source of "the two Hegels." On the one hand, there is Hegel's sense of particular contexts, communities, and cultures; on the other hand, there is his Enlightenment sense of *humanity*, this all-embracing conception that had become, in Kant for example, the key to morality, rationality, politics, religion, and simply "being human." There is, again, this extreme tension in Hegel's Spirit, in other words, between his sense of unity and his sense of differences. And I shall argue in the pages that follow that this essential temperamental tension emerges in the writing of the *Phenomenology* itself, literally splitting the work in two. The incoherence of the *Phenomenology*, I want to argue, is nothing less than the epic philosophical tension of the age—something far more important than the lack of organization of a single philosopher, and something far more earth-shaking than an academic confusion concerning the proper "systematization" of German Idealism.

There is no single political viewpoint that emerges from Hegel's emphasis on humanity and culture and his de-emphasis of the individual. One could argue (and some have) that fascism follows, but one can also find liberal strains equally essential in Hegel that would support an argument for republican democracy or even anarchism on the basis of a similar supra-personal organic view. Hegel, of course, was neither fascist nor democrat and certainly not an anarchist. In 1806, he was actively weighing Rousseau and Herder, Schiller and the new economic liberalism. But in the *Phenomenology* there is no particular political vision, even if—for example in his residual admiration for the Greek *polis*—there is an implicit attack on the foundations of most modern political theories. It is never simply the individual who counts, but always a sense of identity, even a sense of

“immortality,” that depends wholly on one’s conceptual connections with other people.

Hegel’s rejection of the ultimate importance of the individual raises a question of considerable importance not only in his political philosophy but in the *Phenomenology* as well. That is the question of *freedom*. Hegel himself says, of the *Phenomenology*, that it is a book about freedom; and of his philosophy as a whole, he tells us that it is about the realization of freedom, and the idea of freedom, from earliest times to the present. But what Hegel means by “freedom” is by no means obvious. He is very much a part of that tradition from Kant to Marx that distinguishes two kinds of freedom, merely “negative” freedom *from* certain kinds of restraints, and “positive” freedom *to* participate in certain institutions and act in the service of the state. Not without good reason, such liberal authors as Isaiah Berlin have viewed the notion of “positive” freedom as a kind of sham, a crude if too often successful effort to disguise authoritarianism as its very opposite. Any interpretation of Hegel, therefore, is bound to expound on this curious notion—either, so the tradition goes, condemning it as perverted and dangerous, or trying to explain, in benign terms, what it was that Hegel (Kant and Marx, too) actually meant.

What I want to do here, however, is to say very little about freedom in this controversial political sense. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel is mainly concerned with freedom in a very different context, which has little to do with politics in even the broadest of senses. He is concerned with freedom of self-expression or self-realization, which, in a political context, is just as much “freedom from” as “freedom to.” The discussion of “freedom” in the *Phenomenology* begins with Hegel’s famous discussion of the “Master-Slave” relationship, which would seem like a parable of freedom except for one thing: that discussion turns on a paradox according to which it is the slave, not the master, who comes to realize his freedom, and he does this not in society or politics but through work, first of all, and a series of philosophies, all of which have to do with self-identity and have nothing to do with political consciousness or rebellion. Freedom, in other words, means the realization of self-identity, for Hegel. The recognition of one’s identity as a citizen of a state, as a member of a political group, is only one aspect of this all-important and extremely complex concept in Hegel.

Again, we have to look at the times: Hegel is talking about freedom at a time when whole populations were under unenlightened autocratic rule, in which the press was brutally censored and the ability of young intellectuals to express themselves was sharply curtailed by governments (For Marx, too, “freedom” meant first of all freedom of

expression, when he was a censored young journalist in Cologne in 1843.) Thus freedom came to mean first of all the ability to express oneself, to thereby realize one's intellectual potential, to seek out and argue the truth. But there was another paradox to be found here. Under foreign rulers, namely the self-consciously enlightened French, the intellectuals of Germany knew that they would be more free to express themselves and realize this potential than under their own petty princes. This in itself was sufficient to ensure that the concept of freedom would have an ambiguous political history and a confused political analysis. Add to that the general German tendency to depoliticize "freedom" and relegate it to the realm of metaphysics and personal morality—Kant, of course, is the great example,³⁰ and I hope it is evident that one can talk quite sensibly and unobjectionably of Hegel's use of the word "freedom" to characterize his enterprise without introducing distinctly political questions (about the rights and duties of citizens and governments)—or at least, not until much later. Freedom, for Hegel, has to do with identification—how one sees oneself (as citizen, as rebel, as stoic, as master, as slave), it is not the political question of societal restraints and duties.

Hegel's Method: Dialectic

Dialectic . . . first appears to consciousness as something which has it at its mercy, and which does not have its source in consciousness itself. —*Phenomenology*

Everyone knows, if nothing else, that Hegel introduced a philosophical methodology which is in direct competition with the more "analytic" and a-historical methods of deduction, induction and textual philology. It is called "dialectic." Of course, we will talk about dialectic all the way through this book and in some detail in Chapters 4b and c and 7b. But if I may undermine the seriousness of that conscientious enterprise right at the beginning, I will be arguing that Hegel *has no method* as such—at least, not in the *Phenomenology*. He does have a number of arguments and strategies which might be gathered un-

30. Nietzsche: "With respect to the State, Kant was not great." The view of freedom as primarily a function of one's outlook was also to be found in Johann Herder, for whom freedom was "circumspection," and even in Schiller, the champion of liberty for all of the young intellectuals of Hegel's generation. Freedom is freedom of thought and expression, and though Schiller hated despotism and aimed his best plays against tyrants, his sense of liberty would always have seemed downright conservative, if not reactionary, to the embattled philosophers behind the barricades in Paris.

der the same title; but let us be clear about one point from the start. Hegel mentions the word “dialectic” only a few times in the entire book. He has at least a dozen different moves which the commentators have struggled to squeeze into a single logical form and a dozen more that have left the commentators in despair. Hegel himself argues vehemently against the very idea of a philosophical “method,” and in any case trying to reduce this whole rich and complex process into a series of simple philosophical two-steps makes as much sense as trying to understand the complex processes of evolution or organic growth using only the terms of pre-Aristotelean biology (an analogy Hegel might find attractive). But this is not to say, along with many commentators, that Hegel’s dialectic is “loose” or a “failure” or that he does not apply it well.³¹ It depends what you think he’s trying to do.

What we do get in the *Phenomenology*, that might warrant if not deserve the name “dialectic” is a metaphor. It is a grand metaphor, drawn from biology and Aristotle, *via* Goethe, of growth, development, taking shape, moving on, metamorphosis. It is a metaphor that is directly opposed to the more nuts-and-bolts, matter-and-motion-minded mechanical metaphors of Newtonian physics, though it still found its place in Kant (the third *Critique*, not the first) and in Fichte and Schelling. It is the idea of the universe as, in some sense, a living process, growing according to its inner rules and potentials. It is an image that has its obvious and literal interpretation in the development of the individual, “growing up,” and his or her intellectual development (*Bildung*—a word we shall see often). It also has its applicability in the development of humanity as a whole, though this concept was quite novel in 1800. We now talk without hesitation about the history of mathematics or of science, or even the history of art and philosophy, as a progression, literally *progress*, from one form to one better and so on, with not infrequent digressions, of course. That is the “dialectic” of the *Phenomenology*, a metaphor, the metaphor of growth and development of human consciousness, writ large.³² But to call it a “metaphor” is in no way intended to undermine its significance. And to insist that it is not amenable to formalization or to the

31. For example, Frithjof Bergmann, in “The Purpose of Hegel’s System,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1964 (II.2), pp. 189–204; Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 167 ff.; Charles Taylor, esp. *Hegel*, p. 164ff.; J.N. Findlay, *Hegel; A Re-examination* (New York: Humanities, 1964) throughout his discussion of the *Phenomenology*; McTaggart (with reference to the later works); and Alasdair MacIntyre, who interprets Hegel as rigorous but then finds him failing according to that same standard of rigor.

32. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, with particular reference to Hölderlin and Goethe as well as the English romantics.

precision that we demand of untenured professors and graduate students is in no way to deny its importance in this grand philosophical self-portrait which Hegel presents to us.

The word "dialectic," though rarely used by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* (65,66,86), has a long ancestry and already played a major role in German Idealism before him. Kant had used it in his "transcendental dialectic" and Fichte had used it too, structured by the three-part "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" formula that is usually (wrongly) attributed to Hegel. (In fact, he hardly ever used it in the *Phenomenology*, or elsewhere.) But the term itself goes back to the Greeks, where it meant simply "discussion." Plato considered it "the supreme science" and that meant, of course, the dialectic of Socrates' dialogues, the discovery of the truth, through confrontation of competing points of view and extended discussion. In the 18th century, however, the term came to have more negative connotations, and Kant's "transcendental dialectic" was "a logic of illusion." Kant showed in his discussion of the "antinomies" in particular that the dialectical application of reason beyond the bounds of experience resulted in contradictions. He concluded that the method was intrinsically fallacious, that one could not *know* anything about the world in itself. Thus we have two directly conflicting notions of "dialectic": the Platonic notion, in which dialectical confrontation is a means to discover the truth, indeed, the truth "in itself" and behind appearances; and the Kantian notion, in which dialectical contradiction is proof (by way of a *reductio ad absurdum*) that the truth is not to be found beyond the world of "phenomena."

Hegel's use of dialectic is a combination of both of these. He agrees with Kant that the use of reason allows for the creation of antinomies or contradictions, but he also agrees with the ancients that these contradictions are not a dead-end or an absurdity but rather a clue to the truth. That truth is, according to Hegel, that consciousness is capable of opposing points of view and feels the necessity to resolve them. The dialectic of the *Phenomenology* (we can talk this way even if Hegel did not) is the process of discovering the limitations of various "forms of consciousness," in part through the recognition of their contradictions—both internal and external—and thereby coming to see more adequate forms of consciousness that resolve these contradictions. This is *not* to say that dialectic proceeds only through contradictions and their resolution ("thesis-antithesis-synthesis"), and it is to leave open the central tension in Hegel's philosophy—that is, whether the resolution of contradictions ultimately leads to a single, wholly harmonious philosophy free of all tensions and contradictions, or whether the

resolution of contradictions, and the need to overcome the limitations of our current “form of consciousness,” is a perennial process that never comes to an end and never reaches “the Absolute.” What is more, let us not assume too quickly that this represents anything that deserves to be called a philosophical *method* in any usual sense. Indeed, Hegel seems to indicate over and over again (against Fichte and Schelling) that to *impose* a method on a subject matter, rather than to allow the subject matter (in this case, human consciousness) to develop according to its own internal necessity, is to distort the subject matter and defeat the very purpose of philosophy. Of course, one might call this a “method,” just as one might call total permissiveness a method for training dogs and children or *laissez faire* an economic policy. But Hegel would rather call it a *phenomenon*, not a method—part of the subject matter itself rather than the tool of the philosophical observer. That is, insofar as these can be distinguished at all.

In the *Phenomenology*, dialectic and *Bildung* go hand in hand. *Bildung* was originally a religious concept, and *Bild* an image of God. *Bildung* was the path of perfectibility, the ideal, paganized by the Enlightenment to mean the perfectibility of humanity. *Bildung* is the improvement of humanity, through Enlightenment and through unification. It is not just the improvement of philosophy or philosophers but Hegel, like Aristotle and so many other philosophers before (and after) him, surely did see philosophy and conceptual thought as what was most essential to humanity, our “function” or *telos*, our “spark of the divine.” There were no guarantees, no assurances that the Enlightenment hope for wisdom and the romantic dream of harmony would ever be realized, and the philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries were by no means so “optimistic” as they are sometimes said to be, nor so blind to human frailties and stupidities. (Voltaire is a perfect example; he believed in progress and chastised Pascal for his “gloomy pessimism,” but no one has ever been more contemptuous of superstition and ignorance—including the superstition of optimism, in *Candide*, for instance.) The dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, the *Bildung* of human perfectibility and harmony, and the progressive mood of the Enlightenment ultimately were all one and the same, not merely a technical plaything of a few philosophers. They represented the aspirations of the age, not an ascension to God but the “Enlightenment” of society on earth, even if no one knew where they were going or how to proceed.

The *Bildung* metaphor has as its “logic,” however, not the deductive necessity that many scholars have searched for in vain in Hegel, but not mere whim or free association of ideas either. Hegel speaks

opaquely about "the development of the concept" (a phrase taken up literally by both critics and commentators, by the first in order to dismiss Hegel as incomprehensible, and by the latter in order to make Hegel sound even more mysterious); but what he means is simply the changes in our conception of the world as a whole. These changes, like the history of philosophy itself, display a distinctive order, which they themselves dictate, which is not to say that one movement logically follows another, nor is it to deny that the development of our present conceptions could have come about quite differently than they did. But there is nothing mysterious or incomprehensible about this notion of "inner necessity"; every author knows what Hegel means when he says that "the subject matter develops itself." One begins a novel with a set of characters, or a poem with a central image, and one cannot cancel or change these at will. This character can be expected (though not logically required) to do such and such, and this image suggests another, but excludes that one. Similarly, Hegel's dialectic of "the concept" or "forms of consciousness" is an attempt to "think through" our ideas about the world, and about ourselves, developing these ideas—or letting them develop—to the point where we can see their consequences, their inadequacies, their inconsistencies. And by doing so, our comprehension "grows," it becomes more encompassing, letting us see things we did not see, letting us appreciate ideas we could not accept, forcing us to see connections we had not seen before. And the goal of this process, or "Absolute Knowing," is to gain a single all-encompassing conception, which makes sense of everything at once. But though this may be the goal of the *Phenomenology*, it is not its result; there is no end to the process of understanding life, while we are still living it. Hegel began looking for the Absolute, but what he discovered was the richness of conceptual history.

Indeed, I want to argue that no single image has been more detrimental to our understanding of Hegel—or our ability to accept him—than the self-congratulatory idea that his philosophy is the spiral staircase upward to the Absolute, not only because there is no Absolute, but because there is no "upward" either, and no staircase. Whatever else their disagreements, the one view of Hegel's philosophy that seems wholly taken for granted by almost all the commentators is the idea that the dialectic is *going* somewhere; but to move is not necessarily to move in any particular direction, and increasingly to comprehend the complexity and expanse of the world is not always an improvement or progress. One of the more obnoxious features of philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle to such modern stoics as Spinoza and Schopenhauer, is their unabashed tendency to declare their

own profession, thinking, as indubitably the "highest" human activity, and "thinking about thinking" (or, as many of these thinkers think, "thought thinking itself") as the very purpose of the cosmos itself. But once one steps outside of philosophy (and indeed, sometimes inside of it, too), there is no justification whatsoever for this self-congratulatory view. To think with increasing clarity and comprehension is an undeniable desideratum of thought, and increasingly to appreciate both the unity and differences of what we call "humanity" may be an important goal in a world which is quickly shrinking, getting more crowded and more violent. But none of this justifies the arrogant pretentiousness of some philosophers, that philosophy alone is the answer to the world's problems, and that thinking itself is what makes us uniquely "human." Hegel may have believed these things, but the *Phenomenology* presents us with a very different image; the dialectic is more of a panorama of human experience than a form of cognitive ascension. It has its definite movements, even improvements, but it is the journey, not the final destination, that gives us our appreciation of humanity, its unity and differences. And if, as in Goethe's *Faust*, there is a sudden but unanticipated divine act of salvation at the very end of the drama, this is more poetic license than the conceptual climax of all that has gone before it.

Growing does not mean "growing up," and any morbid sophomore can tell you that every step along the path of life is also a step toward death as well. But the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* also suggests another biological metaphor, less botanical and more carnivorous than the "growth" metaphor; in fact, it is downright cannibalistic. It is the picture that we get throughout the *Phenomenology* (there is a great deal of oral imagery) of consciousness as voracious, as "gobbling up" (Hegel's term) everything it confronts. But it does this, not necessarily by physical subjugation (though sometimes this, too), but through conceptual comprehension (*begreifen*), indeed by naming. Thus Jean-Paul Sartre tells us in his autobiography *The Words* that he took possession of objects by writing about them, and the ancient astrologers sought to conquer the heavens (4000 years before the Apollo XI mission) through simple understanding. Adam, Hegel tells us, "showed his dominance over the animals by naming them."³³ Thus there is a kind of conceptual imperialism in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, itself a product of the Enlightenment and the whole of Christianity, a cannibalistic consciousness that insists on assimilating everything, in particular,

33. In Hegel's "Differenz-essay" of 1801. ("The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy," translated by W. Cerf and H.S. Harris, S.U.N.Y. Press, 1977), p. 85.) Also in his lectures of Winter 1803.

everything "human." Thus what can too easily be viewed as the banality of "humanism" becomes in Hegel a voracious arrogance, which Claude Lévi-Strauss (criticizing neo-Hegelian Jean-Paul Sartre) calls "transcendental humanism," and which I have elsewhere called "the transcendental pretense."³⁴ This is the view that all of "humanity" can be understood in our own image and in our terms. Hegel's dialectic will "stop at nothing"—or rather, it will not stop until it has encompassed *everything*. In the *Phenomenology*, at least, the transcendental pretense is more than balanced by Hegel's appreciation of differences. But in "the Absolute" and in what is often made out of Hegel, the entire cosmos is made over into a function of the Spirit of German philosophy. That is not a "higher synthesis," as the jargon goes; it is European cultural imperialism and a historical rationale for murder.

Hegel: An Interpretation

Theoretical work, I am more convinced each day, brings to the world more than practical work; once the world of ideas is revolutionized, actuality cannot remain as it is. —Hegel, letter to Schelling

The Hegel who will emerge from the following pages and from the *Phenomenology* is a very humanist (and human) Hegel. He is an anti-religious and anti-metaphysical proponent of the varieties of human experience, a conceptual anthropologist rather than an ontologist.³⁵ He is not particularly political but he knows what is going on and is visibly affected by it. He has a keen sense of our each having been "thrown" into a world not of our own choosing, but we are responsible thereby for making sense out of it. We are raised in a particular culture and with our own narrow views of the world which we are taught almost inevitably to be uniquely "true," only to find ourselves, at some point in our lives, facing a world which is no longer familiar or simple—and we have to understand these breakdowns and, if possible, transcend them. That is the Hegel I find most appealing, the Hegel who will be found here. He is an "existentialist" of sorts, as Merleau-Ponty argued some twenty-five years ago, in the sense that

34. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), ch. 9.

35. The term "anthropologist" was applied by Klaus Hartmann to Løwenberg's conception of Hegel (with which I am here in basic agreement). Hartmann himself has developed one of the most thorough reinterpretations of Hegel as a non-ontologist, a piece of which is to be found in his essay, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in Alasdair MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1972).

he insists that we now make for ourselves the meaning which as children we once took for granted in the world and that we are ultimately responsible for the way the world is.³⁶ What we do not get out of Hegel, of course, is that other “existentialist” tenet, of individual freedom of choice, but neither does he in any way preclude this freedom. Indeed, it is no mistake that such outspoken champions of individual freedom and responsibility as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty remained unabashed Hegelians throughout their “existentialist” careers; and Søren Kierkegaard, the first existentialist, was simply mistaken when he viewed Hegel as the ultimate collectivist and rationalist who had taken the risk and the passion out of our existence and replaced them with his “system.” For Hegel, too, the universe was fragmented and torn, but Hegel insisted that we must attempt to mend it. Quite to the contrary of ignoring passion and subjectivity, Hegel argued that every generation must see the whole of human history as a gigantic drama, a stage on which we are ready to begin what may turn out to be the definitive act.³⁷

Hegel may have little to say about the “existential” dimension of our lives in the individual sense; where he presents us with personal dilemmas—the tragic dilemma of Antigone, for example—he treats them as a step in a process, without individual resolution. But yet there is another side of this picture, which Kierkegaard in his intense individualism would not consider—the motion of collective responsibility and self-determination, leading up to and including the self-realization and universal unity of humanity, in all its variations, as a whole, at one with the universe. Whatever he may have said later on, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is no treatise on passive resignation, but a call to action—if first of all (but not only, as Kierkegaard charged) in thought. And if, in his successful years in Berlin, the “dialectic” became a tired formula, in 1806 in the *Phenomenology*, it is full of hope and enthusiasm, taking the reconciliation of the warring factions of humanity not as a foregone or inevitable conclusion but as our common and shared goal, a genuine possibility, to which we had never before been so close. The *Phenomenology* is a summons to the world—in unappealing philosophical prose, perhaps—for a mutual apprecia-

36. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism,” in *Sense and Non-Sense* trans. Hubert and Patricia Dreyfus (Northwestern Univ. Press. 1964), pp. 63–70.

37. Klaus Hartmann uses the familiar example of Proust, who has his character sit down in the last chapter to write the novel which in fact we have been reading. A contemporary example of the same ploy is Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and, of course, several dozen films, for instance Robert Hamer’s *Kind Hearts and Coronets* in 1949. But the view that the definitive act must be the writing of a book is, again, a distinctively intellectual pretense and not, I should argue, essential to the Hegelian viewpoint as such.

tion of differences and at the same time a sense of common spiritual unity. It is a view of self-identity that rejects the autonomy of the isolated individual, but it also rejects the banal and contentless concept of "a human being." It is full of appreciation for what is still platitudinously called "the human family," in which (as Marx was to dream, too, a half-century later) each individual can realize his or her full potential, as an artist, a worker, a family member, and as a citizen. We create oppositions and conflicts, and we can transcend them.

The *Phenomenology* is an inspiring picture; it can easily be turned into an insipid one. But our suspicions betray our own disillusionment and cynicism, which the older Hegel would have shared with us. In 1806, however, Hegel was dealing with an international situation unprecedented in the history of the modern world, which certainly seemed, at the time, apocalyptic. He was the citizen of a non-nation whose sense of impotence makes our own sense of powerlessness seem self-induced by contrast. And most of all, in 1806, with the world at war, Hegel was reminding himself and everyone else of the grand importance of *ideas*, of the way philosophy gives life a perspective and can be a source of inspiration and meaningfulness. He did not think that philosophy was everything, but at least he saw it as *something*. What a telling contrast to our own times, when college students argue "the absurdity of human existence" because gasoline prices are climbing toward the two-dollar mark, and when philosophers argue amongst themselves solutions to technical problems which they themselves have invented and soon will abandon without consequence.

In a world that has come to see ideas and collective enthusiasm with horror, Hegel becomes a gateway to a new world, where ideas are the key to consciousness, where the philosopher becomes the spokesman for the times and the prophet of a united humanity. It is a world in which archaic terms like "harmony" and "humanity" still make sense—indeed, still give us something to hope for. It is a world worth, at least, considering.

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Part One

Setting the Stage—the Times,
the Man, the Book

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Chapter One

The Spirit of the Times

The philosophy of history is nothing other than an approach to history as the product of reason . . . To him who looks with a rational eye, history in term presents its rational aspect. —Hegel, *Philosophy of History*

History unquestionably is conspiratorially manipulated from time to time, but even if it weren't, we would want to think so, hoping against hope that a secularized world can still, however dreadfully, make sense. If the CIA did not exist, it would probably be necessary to invent it, along with International Communism, Zionism, the Mafia, the PLO, the John Birch Society, OPEC and bankers. —Thomas R. Edwards, *NYRB*, Feb. 8, 1979

Philosophy is the expression of its culture and its time. This was certainly Hegel's view, and it is only fitting, if not also true, that we should view his philosophy in just the same way.

Hegel describes his own epoch as “a period of transition.” So, I suppose, is every epoch, every year, every millisecond. But in that short fifteen years between the French Revolution and the march of Napoleon across the face of Europe, the description acquires a special poignancy. Hegel's world was in a state of chaos. What is most significant for us, however, is how Hegel and his friends experienced that chaos. Not as apocalypse, despite the imminent destruction of German society as it had existed for four centuries. Not as insanity, despite the presence of battles and bloodshed on a scale hitherto unknown in the world. Not with despair, despite the fact that Hegel makes it very clear that the future—which he always abstains from predicting— is the great “Unknown.”

Hegel describes what he sees as the “birth of a new world,” a “burst of sunlight,” the beginning of the final realization of the human Spirit, “the Absolute,” or in simpler terms, the age-old ideal of “the perfectibility of humanity.” Whatever else the word “Spirit” (*Geist*) means in Hegel's philosophy, it first of all signifies its ordinary English meaning, “spirited,” lively, a shared sense of movement, purpose, and unity.

We should begin, therefore, with an obvious if unflattering contrast. In the midst of our own society with a standard of living and sense of security unknown in the history of the world, the "spirit of our times" is anything but spirited. Our sense of aimlessness and fragmentation, so evident in our popular literature as well as the more successful philosophical movements of the century, is in marked contrast with the enthusiastic if also anxious optimism that permeates Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the other literature of the time. Many of today's students seem to think that "the human condition is absurd," to use one of their most common melodramatic phrases, because there is an "energy crisis," inflation, the prospect of a less than exhilarating job, some vague apprehension of nuclear disaster, and the over-all banality of television programming. Hegel, anticipating the obliteration of the world he knew, was already celebrating the birth of a new one.

To understand Hegel, then, begins with an understanding of that sense of awakening that is now so far from our own attitudes. Whatever else the pretentious term "Absolute" will designate in his philosophy, it first of all connotes *confidence*, certainly not omniscience, as his critics have sometimes suggested. It is the sense that we do have knowledge and are learning ever more; it is the sense that life has meaning, even in the face of Napoleon's Continental armies, in the face of death, and perhaps, too, the death of God. It is a sense of the inevitable triumph of humanity and the *meaning* of human life. This sense of meaning, however, is surely not to be found on a purely individual basis. Again, this is in marked contrast to our own non-negotiable passion for the integrity of the individual person. But in those turbulent times, with a million men and more on a single field of battle, anonymously distinguished only by the color of their uniforms and the shape of their hats, similar in the color of their freely flowing blood and the fear in their loins, the individual could hardly be thought to count for much. In fact, even whole societies were dwarfed in this cosmic spectacle, so that the difference between Saxon and Prussian, Polish and Russian, depended far more on the daily status of tenuous and often broken treaties than the cultural distinctions upon which they prided themselves. The meaning of all of this, given the insistence on finding one, could only be found on the level of *humanity* as a whole.

We too look at history, trying to find within it some basis for hope. We no longer see the beneficence of God's creation. We cast our jaded eye at science, no longer an unqualified source of pride. We admire the history of art but hardly see it as the source of the meaning of history. We too might describe history, as Hegel did, as a "slaughter-

bench." But where he found hope, we find absurdity and stupidity. Where he discovered a sense of Providence, we manufacture a sense of conspiracy. Where he joined a generation of German literati in announcing the "redemption" of humanity, our intellectuals disagree mainly about the precise course of the impending apocalypse. The images are religious, but the impulse is thoroughly secular and humanist, the perfection ("realization") of humanity ("spirit"). We assume as our dogma the priority of the individual—and the individual freedom, individual rights, individual happiness. We reject as anathema what we take to be the authoritarianism entailed by the Hegelian view of a spiritual, unified humanity, and we reject as absurd the optimism with which he presented that view. But is his collective euphoria to be so easily despised, if the alternative is our own desperate isolation and sense of absurdity? I am not going to try to answer that question in this book, but I at least want to try to understand it. And that means, first of all, getting a sense of a period and its outlook which now seems as foreign to our own as the world of the ancient Greeks, to which Hegel so often appeals.

The New World: 1806

Ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited . . . (It) is never at rest but always engaged in moving forward . . . and in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world. —*Phenomenology*

The Emperor—this world-soul—riding through the city . . . It is indeed a wonderful feeling to see such an individual who . . . sitting on a horse, reaches out over the world and dominates it . . . —Hegel, letter to Niethammer (1806)

In 1806, the year that Hegel wrote most of his *Phenomenology*, the world—or at least the European theater of the world—was in a state of total confusion.

The English Revolution had undermined the divine right of kings; the French Revolution had eliminated the monarch himself. The legitimacy of governments was now openly challenged.

The Enlightenment had undermined the Divine Himself. The existence of God, or at least, His significance, was now open to question.

An empire that had survived a thousand years—at least in name, was about to come to a most undignified end, not so much conquered

as simply extinguished, like a half-dead campfire, only a few of its coals, scattered across the ground, still showing any fire at all.

Germany was not yet Germany, the most powerful and prosperous nation in Western Europe; it was 234 fragmented petty states and principalities, many of them still medieval in their temperament if "enlightened" in their pretensions. They considered themselves part of the "East," a synonym for "backward" through most of the "West." They were ruled by small-minded tyrants of varying degrees of incompetence, and they were still devastated, both morally and economically, from the Thirty Years War, which had ended more than 150 years earlier.

By 1806 Napoleon had crushed the forces combined against him, brought mighty Prussia to her knees, unceremoniously absorbed the former "Holy Roman Empire" and installed himself as its new Charlemagne. He consolidated many of the scattered German principalities into a single "Confederation of the Rhine," with new and enlightened rules of government, the Napoleonic code of laws and the new and revolutionary promises of "liberty, equality, fraternity."

After years of despair and looking in envy across the French border, the hope of a modernized and revitalized Germany had become a very real possibility. And with it, the hope of a united, peaceful, and prosperous Europe.

Only a few years later, there would be "Wars of Liberation" *against* Napoleon. But at the turn of the century, he was still the liberator. Whatever their doubts—and there were reasons for doubt even before 1806—young Germans saw him as their instrument of destiny, clearing away the corrupt and stagnant structures of still feudal Germany to make room for the bright new world. In 1802, one of the princes of the new Confederation summarized the widespread attitude: "This extraordinary man, who brought order out of the anarchy of France . . . has the greatness of soul that is needed to rise above being merely the benefactor of a single nation to become the benefactor of mankind."¹

Of course, Napoleon used the German Confederation merely for his own convenience, as a buffer against Prussia and the Austrian empire in the East. He gave the Germans their strength and autonomy but he made sure that they remained wholly dependent on France. Whatever his motives, however, the results were real enough, and if Hegel too had his doubts when he watched "this world soul on horseback" parade with his troops through Jena, he already knew how to

1. See Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 196x), esp. chs. 1 and 2.

distinguish between the personal ambitions of such “world historical individuals” and the “cunning of reason” which used them for its own purposes. Besides, Hegel had grown up in Stuttgart, near the French border, in the duchy of Württemberg and thus an integral part of the Rheinische Confederation. In Württemberg, loyalty to Napoleon ran especially high, continuing even through the Wars of Liberation. To distinguish the extent to which this was political expediency from the degree of genuine gratitude presumes a dubious clarity in human motivation. What is clear, however, is that Hegel carried that sense of Napoleon’s importance even to Berlin, and when Napoleon was exiled to St. Helena and Europe entered “the Reaction,” Hegel expressed in no uncertain terms his sense of disillusionment. But in 1806, the new world was just beginning, and Napoleon was the instrument who had made it possible. It was a world that had long been defined by philosophers, whom Hegel considered (with the poets and playwrights) the “consciousness” of humanity, and it could be understood, in one important sense, only in terms of the new philosophy of humanism, self-realization, and freedom. The vehicle of salvation, however, would certainly be the new culture of a revitalized Germany, not the armies of France.

The new German sense of mission was expressed by virtually every German writer of the period, but by no one more eloquently than Johann Goethe, who was largely responsible for the cultural rebirth that made that sense of mission possible.² “When I was 18,” Goethe later said, “Germany was only 18 herself.” He had then been part of the *Sturm und Drang* (“Storm and Stress”) movement of the 1760s and ’70s; his sentimental novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) had been an international best-seller and a first contribution to what Goethe called “world literature.” It was a German soap opera that caught the feelings of all of Europe, a private emotional purge that announced the romantic adolescence of a new Germany and symbolized the sentimental unity of human nature. Goethe, like Hegel and Napoleon, was a “world historical individual” who pursued the goals of the hu-

2. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1749 (Aug. 28)–1832. Indeed the exact period of Hegel’s lifetime, 1770–1831, is often called *Goethezeit*, Goethe’s time, and he is more a model for the “spirit of the times” than any movement or political concern. Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is more like *Faust* (not published in full until after Goethe’s death) than any other work. Goethe’s own rich and varied life, as a conservative and libertine, as a young lawyer and as author-autocrat of Weimar, as an artist, a scientist, and above all, a poet, has often been compared to the rich and varied experience of Germany from the first waves of chauvinism and sentiment with the poet Klopstock to the beginnings of militaristic nationalism. Goethe, the cultural representative of 18th-century Germany, displayed an intense sense of local loyalty coupled with a global sense of mission, a keen sense of personal freedom expression coupled with an almost reactionary suspicion of all political activism.

man Spirit while expressing his own needs ("if I didn't write poems, I would perish") in the cultural idiom of his own language. Humanity was one, but it was only in the diversity of cultures that this unity could be realized.

Goethe's greatest work would not appear for many years, but when it did, *Faust* would summarize not only the new German aspirations but the nature of human life as such. *Faust* was not just the story of a German medieval *magus* who bargained his soul with the devil. Goethe often said that a "demon" had entered into him, and forced him to write just as it forced Napoleon toward his obsessive and ultimately self-destructive conquests. The "demon" was the dark and picturesque image of what Hegel would call "Spirit," but his appearance as Mephistopheles in *Faust* appealed to future generations far more than Hegel's "cold" concepts. Both are concerned with a central theme: the ceaseless struggle and striving of life, "never at rest" Hegel says in his Preface, tenuously leaping from one uncertain experiment to the next. It was an appropriate theme for the new century; to rest content in a restless world was damnation; the struggle itself, salvation.³

Goethe believed that Germany had little role in the new political order. He disdained the Wars of Liberation as pointless vanity, and he too remained loyal to "his Emperor" even through Waterloo and the Treaty of Vienna. The virtues of Germany, he argued, were cultural, not political:

The Germans should be dispersed throughout the world like the Jews, in order to develop all the good that is in them for the benefit of mankind.—letter to Müller (1808)

(Hegel had used the same comparison in 1800, in an unpublished essay). The German mission, in other words, was the cultural redemption of humanity.

Goethe's combination of cultural nationalism and ideological internationalism, although by no means universal in Germany, points to the single issue that was foremost in the German consciousness: how can a people develop and distinguish themselves, in other words have a *culture*, without cutting themselves off from the rest of the world? How can a people be unique but at the same time wholly human? If we are to understand the hopeful but defensive stance of these questions, we might well translate it into our own times, for example, the struggle now waged in the United States by Blacks, Chicanos, and Indians. Ultimately, it is a question not of customs and habits, surely

3. See M.H. Abrams, *Natural Super-Naturalism*, for a good discussion of this comparison. I have discussed it at some length in my *History and Human Nature*, esp. chs. 7 and 11.

not of race, but *respect*. To emphasize a model of “humanity” in which one becomes a second-class person is, for us, intolerable, but if becoming wholly “human” means sacrificing one’s culture, that is, one’s identity, that is also intolerable. In 1806, to be “cosmopolitan” was to be French, just as to be “American” today still approximates white, Protestant middle-class. Politically, Germany was a pawn on the map of Europe. Goethe’s emphasis on German culture, then, was not just a writer praising his own pursuits, but an attempt to create a German identity in the realm of the possible, which was to say, not in politics but in poetry.⁴

A Quest for Identity

It doesn’t take much to see that the problems of three little people don’t amount to a hill o’ beans in this crazy world. Someday you’ll understand. —“Rick” in *Casablanca*

One of Hegel’s often-repeated technical phrases is “the universal actualized through the particular.” Whatever deeper meanings that phrase may reveal as metaphysics, it had an extremely tangible significance in the quest for self-identity that pervaded Germany in these crucial years. Ultimately, it may be that each of our identities is simply to be “a human being”, as the new ideology of the French and the English had been stressing behind their slogan, “freedom, equality, fraternity.” But the French and English had their national identities and could take for granted what the Germans could not, a spiritual unity within the grand abstraction of “humanity”. The Germans found their role obscure; insofar as they saw themselves as “German,” they found themselves on the defensive. The quest for identity, then, was a quest for what Kant described as “human dignity,” or what Hegel later described as being “worthy of respect.”⁵

Culture is identity. In our American sense of individualism, devoid of history and blind to the social matrix *within* which we distinguish ourselves, we tend too easily to forget that identity is not so much the petty differences between us (owning a Chrysler, working for A&M company, being the boss) as the ties that bind us together, a common

4. A good discussion of German politics during this period, and the poetic impulse that took the place of political activism, is Geoffrey Barraclough’s classic *Origins of Modern Germany* (New York: Putnam, 1963) and his *Factors in German History* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1946).

5. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, and What Is Enlightenment?*, trans. L. W. Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), esp. ch. 2.

history, an inherited experience, a common language. When traveling, for example, one finds relief with virtually any other American—who “speaks the same language,” uses the same metaphors, refers to the same institutions, knows at least some of the same cities. And in Asia, for example, one might find relief with any European, with whom one can at least exchange mutually understood pleasantries.

We take our language for granted, but it is in and through our language that we define ourselves. With this in mind, we can fully appreciate the problems of identity in Germany at the turn of the last century, when even the king of Prussia, the mightiest German state, could not speak fluent German. He spoke French. The fashions of the court were French. The literature was French. Even the ideas were French. It should not be surprising, then, that Goethe and other *Sturm und Drang* poets, and philosophers like Lessing and Herder, should have seen the German struggle for cultural independence primarily in terms of German literature, German theater, German expression of German ideas. Through philosophy and poetry, there would be a German revolution, equivalent in its profundity to the violent altercations in France. To be part of humanity required first a cultural identity of one’s own.⁶

The problem of German identity was, quite simply, that there was no such identity. One tended to identify with a town, or one’s family, or perhaps the local prince or duke. Or—in accordance with the new principles that had changed the shape of Europe—one might identify with the whole of “humanity,” a profound abstraction to be sure, but still an abstraction, hardly an identity one could wear on the street. Or, even more abstractly, one could identify with the cosmos, the All, in the underground Spinozistic fashion then circulating among the German intellectuals—what Hegel and other German Idealists would call “the Absolute”.⁷ But that concept was not only abstract: it was

6. The champions of German identity were two philosophers, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). Lessing was first of all a playwright, as well as a thinker of considerable influence; he was instrumental in establishing a national German theater, in which German language and German experiences would replace the dominant French influences and French plays which excluded most Germans, as if the French experience and language were indeed universal and local experiences and languages were to be dismissed as provincial and unimportant. Herder was a thinker of considerable depth who attacked the Enlightenment itself, with its pretensions of universality, and insisted upon the ultimacy of *Volk* languages, local dialectics, and cultural experiences. Both figures were to have an enormous effect on Hegel, despite the fact that in many of their views they were opposed to one another.

7. Both Herder and Lessing shared in the new enthusiasm for Spinoza, who had written in Amsterdam almost a century earlier). Spinoza’s central teaching was the unity of all the universe as a single “*substance*,” including God and all of us. He called this one substance “God”; his philosophy is thus often called “pantheism”—the view that God is identical to the entirety of his creation.

obscure and all but incomprehensible without the differences *within* “the Absolute” that made up “humanity.” Humanity or “Spirit” was the boundless circumference of a concentric and crisscrossing set of more concrete identities, particularly at the cultural level—and this was precisely what the Germans did not yet have. What they required was a picture of their place in the world, their role in humanity, their mission as a culture, to make their traumatized life make some sense, have some significance, and to make them, in the often repeated phrase of the times, “worthy of respect.”

Atomistic, individual identity is not identity. An individual alone, Hegel argues, is nothing. Antigone was a tragic figure, according to Hegel, because she was torn between two identities, two sets of obligations—human and divine. Some Americans, however, have six identity crises before breakfast. Identity for us has become a great muddle, an individual problem—which is, of course, itself the problem. But for Hegel too, the problem of identity was largely the problem of a multitude of conflicting identities—family, class, community, Germany, God, church, Napoleon, and “humanity.” One no longer found “natural identity,” for what is “natural” for us, like everything else, had now become an open question.⁸

The Use and Abuse of History

... how transitory all human structures are, nay how oppressive the best institutions become in the course of a few generations. The plant blossoms and fades; your fathers have died, and mouldered into dust: your temple is fallen: your tabernacle, the tables of your law are no more; language itself, that bond of mankind, becomes antiquated: and shall a political constitution, shall a system or government or religion . . . endure forever? —Johann Herder (*To a Philosophy of the History of Man*)

The quest for identity is not, some existentialists aside, a perennial question. It emerges within a culture—or a person—when one’s sense of self-worth is in question. In 1806 the French did not have an identity crisis; they asked only how far they could get, and what was the

8. This notion of “natural” found its origins, most of all, in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s powerful philosophy of man’s “natural goodness” corrupted by the conventions of civilized society. Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) was among the books most treasured by the young Hegel, and also by Goethe, by Herder and Kant. For the Germans of the turn of the century, the conventions of society were primarily French and Lutheran; our “natural” vocation, therefore, was to be found elsewhere—in poetic inspiration (Goethe) or in philosophical reason (Kant).

cost. They needed no *Phenomenology*; they had Napoleon. (It is the *poverty* of 19th-century French philosophy that is significant.) Germany, on the other hand, was a fragmented victim, devastated by the last war, stagnant for years, and now absorbed as a buffer in the continental system; the Germans needed a sense of themselves, since they could not find it in the present, they turned to the past, to the middle ages and the great rulers of history, real or imagined. While the French fought for "eternal principles" and, if they looked to history at all, saw only Louis XIV and the ancient Romans, the Germans reconstructed a murky medieval past, a sense of "destiny" as a nation, a mystical sense of identity in such folk legends as *Faust*. As virtually every intellectual historian has pointed out, the most distinctive contribution of the Germans to the intellectual history of this period was their sense of history itself, so glaringly absent in the French and English ideologies. But this sense of the past, of imaginary *Bildung* rather than progress, was not merely an invention of the intellectuals. It was an essential part of the quest for identity, a particularly German identity, which could not yet look to its success in the present for a sense of self-worth. It was a desperate sense, not so much concerned with what one has done nor even with what one might become so much as a mere sense of duration, survival, and emergence. The French talked revolution; the Germans, redemption. The difference in the dominant metaphors is extremely significant. The French owned the world. The Germans, with history as their justification and consciousness as their Continental Army, would comprehend it in the realm of thought.

The turn to the past had two different forms in Germany: two different pasts, in fact. First, there was the old Germany—medieval, before the Reformation, feudal but familial, united by a single religion and a "folk-culture". Once it had been a world empire, not French but German, ruled not by "Charlemagne" but by "Karl der Grosse." (Hegel describes such a past, for example in his 1800 essay "The German Constitution.") It was an imaginary past, "the good old days," before the intrusion of the more powerful and united French nation, before the domination of French culture, before the mischief—however necessary—of Luther's Reformation, the start of all those modern troubles whose seeds are rebellion, autonomy, and the rejection of authority. In fact, from some of the descriptions, it becomes clear that the reconstructed German past went clearly back to the Romans, the tribes described by Tacitus, the "barbarians" who overran the Roman Empire and, in 476, placed one of their own on the throne of the world. This was a Germany of the North, opposed to Latin cul-

ture (represented by the French). It was a culture of warriors of the forest, Gothic and mysterious, not "enlightened," liberal, or urbane.

But there was another past, curiously opposed, on the other side of the historical story. The Germans also looked back to the Greeks—the Greeks before the Roman conquests—as kindred spirits, as their own model of perfection. The ancient Greeks had succeeded in achieving a masterpiece of cultural unity, through their art and religion, despite the tragic political fragmentation that ultimately destroyed them. The Greeks, as opposed to the Romans, were a "spiritual" people, much like the Germans. The Romans, on the other hand, were primarily political people, and the French fascination with Rome, not Greece, was perfectly appropriate to their sense of political rebirth, their sense of republicanism and, after Napoleon's self-coronation in 1804, their sense of Empire as well. Compare, for example, the "Roman" paintings of Jacques-Louis David, portraits of courage and republican virtue, with the enthusiastic descriptions of Greek art written by Winckelmann and the classical poetry written at the same time in Germany, wholly concerned with Greek spirituality and sensuality; not a word about politics or courage, and very little about virtue as such.⁹ This classical past was obviously at odds with the Germanic past, not only historically but conceptually and ideologically as well. The classical nostalgia was foreign, distant, more of a contrast than a kinship, however hard Goethe and his neoclassical colleagues tried to sense that they themselves were the reborn spirit of the ancients. (Goethe crammed his house full of statuettes and antiquities, for example, copied Greek verse in his German poetry, and behaved like a pagan as well as he could.) The worship of the classics was humbling; the Germans felt they could not even approach the spiritual perfection of the ancients. But this too was at one with the Spirit of Germany as such, nationally proud but humbled and confused between facts and fantasy. The classical image provided an aesthetic and, ultimately, a philosophical ideal, but it was the German identity that would provide that sense of culture that the Germans needed most. The

9. I have discussed the connections between German philosophy and French art in the early 19th century in my *History and Human Nature*, chs. 9, 13. David's "Oath of the Horatii" of 1785, for example, is intended to inspire political sacrifice and courage, the likes of which are not to be found in Germany. Compare, for example, Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea* of a few years later, in which the virtues of the French Revolution are starkly (and unfavorably) contrasted with the more domestic virtues of a distinctively bourgeois bumpkin Hermann. Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) was one of the first German journalists to write about the newly discovered excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and Greek and Roman art in general. (Lessing also wrote about this extensively.) His enthusiasm affected a whole generation of Germans, who began looking at Greece as just the lost "natural harmony" Rousseau and they had been looking for.

“quiet simplicity and simple grandeur” that Winckelmann fantasized in the Greeks was hardly appropriate to Germany in the world of 1806. Not surprisingly then, the rage, for the classics that had defined Goethe’s work through the 1780s and 1790s, with his friend Schiller and the young poet Friedrich Hölderlin,¹⁰ quietly and simply burned itself out by 1804, when Winckelmann was murdered in Trieste, when Goethe, speaking Winckelmann’s eulogy, was already turning away from the past and back toward the present via *Faust*. Schiller died, and Hölderlin became hopelessly insane. And yet, we must not underestimate the powerful influence the classical nostalgia would have on young Hegel, who would continue to use the ancient Athenians as a model straight through to his last works. But the ideal of the classics gave way to a more distinctively German nostalgia, the nostalgia of the Gothic German past. The German poets of 1806, for example, talked about little else.¹¹

The turn to history had a philosophical basis. The French-Swiss philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, and many of the English theorists as well, had based their utopian visions of the ideal state on a mythological construction about the “state of nature” and the life of humanity before the conventions of society and complexities of modern life had their irreversible effects. For Rousseau, this pre-social life literally began before society, with individual creatures wandering around in the woods (much as he wandered about in Paris, his “natural goodness” deeply at odds with the artificiality of French society). But in Germany this image was adapted to a more social conception. (Much as, in Rousseau’s second *Discourse*, the “noble savage” also gives way to a more tribal image, but still “before society” as we know it.¹²) The early Greeks were the model for this “natural” state, an ideal

10. Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) were, perhaps, the two most direct influences on Hegel. Schiller was a playwright who was also a student of Kant, a disciple of Rousseau, and a self-proclaimed champion of freedom. He was also Goethe’s best friend. Hölderlin is generally considered one of the great lyrical poets of German literature; he was also a correspondent of both Goethe and Schiller and, most important, he was Hegel’s roommate in college. We shall see much of him in what follows.

11. Many of the “Gothic” myths and allegories that would become, for example, the themes of Wagner’s great operas a half-century later were reformulated and elevated to the status of *Volk*-spirit during this time, by the poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenburg), by the critics August and Friedrich von Schlegel, and by the energetic spokeswoman for the whole neo-romantic movement, Madame de Stäel.

12. Rousseau’s much-quoted distinction between man “in the state of nature” and “corrupted” by civilization is in fact a four- or five-part distinction in which the higher stages of “the state of nature” already include primitive family and tribal life and much of what we already consider “civilized.” For a good discussion, see Lovejoy’s discussion of the second *Discourse* (that is, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Between Men*, 1754), “The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality*,” in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 14–37.

harmony in both personal life and domestic politics. Perhaps the early German *Volk* were natural too, or naturally “super-natural” as one current expression would have it. For Rousseau, this pseudo-historical image provided an explanation and a basis for the construction of society; for the Germans, it was more like edification, a sense of the past, but these images too indicated the course most desired, most “natural” for the future. The shift from the Greek past to the German past therefore becomes highly significant, and the year 1804, when Hegel was beginning his *Phenomenology*, becomes the year of a momentous change of attitude. The fantasy of the sunny skies of ancient Greece is given up in favor of a search into the shadows of German history and culture. But in 1806, that history was plainly in the future.

Sun and Shadows

“Enlightenment.” By this simple means pure insight will resolve the confusion of the world. —*Phenomenology*

In the prelude to his invaluable study of Hegel's early development, H. S. Harris explains his title, *Towards the Sunlight*, as a series of metaphors, all of which deeply affected the young Hegel as a student.¹³ Harris emphasizes the sunlight of ancient Greece and the Platonic allegory from the *Republic*—the sun of eternal truth, in contrast to the mere shadows in which most men live. Most immediately, however, is the sunshine of the Enlightenment, the German *Aufklärung*, the “light of reason” celebrated by Descartes and the bright new world that Hegel had read about in Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet, promised by the French in the west and defended by Immanuel Kant far to the east in Prussia. This would be the “sunburst” of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the new light of Truth that German philosophy would announce to the world. The Enlightenment metaphor, which had already inspired revolutions in England, America, and France, now passed into Germany, as *Aufklärung*, literally a *clarification* of the world.

The Enlightenment defined itself by its dedication to reason and its devoted attack on prejudice and superstition. Its French practitioners called themselves “philosophers,” although their criticism was more often political and social than metaphysical. In fact, they tended

13. H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Towards the Sunlight 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), which has just been succeeded by his new study, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

to despise metaphysics and philosophy as such. The Enlightenment was self-consciously cosmopolitan; it concerned itself with “humanity” and systematically denied any significant differences between peoples or periods. David Hume summarized the attitude in his *Enquiry* of 1749, when he wrote:

It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations . . . Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. —*Enquiry on Human Nature*

It was a powerful political weapon, this notion of universality. We find it, for example, in our own Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident” (“self-evidence” was another irrefutable pretension of Enlightenment thinking) “that all men are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Enlightenment principles lay behind the “liberty, equality, fraternity” of the French Revolution and it was in the name of Enlightenment principles that Napoleon “liberated” Germany. By the turn of the century, the Enlightenment Spirit of criticism, imminently practical, political, concerned not so much with abstract ideas as the good life for humanity, absolutely dominated Europe.¹⁴

In Germany, the Enlightenment had its most able defender of all, the philosopher Immanuel Kant. From his safe and distant perch near the shores of the Baltic Sea, over a thousand miles from Paris, Kant applauded the French Revolution, not only in its first days of enlightened reform, but even through the Reign of Terror of 1792–95, when other Germans, including Goethe and young Hegel, began timidly to turn away. But Kant was an anomaly in Germany, not only because of his abstract political radicalism but because of his defense of the Enlightenment itself. Kant was defending the clarity of reason at a time when the general sympathy of the German intellectuals was turning increasingly toward mysticism and anti-intellectualism. Even in his hometown of Königsberg, where he was indeed the philosopher king, Kant had to share attention with his good friend, but an obscure and forgettable philosopher, Johann Hamann, who followed the mystical tradition of Meister Eckhardt rather than the illuminating ideals of Voltaire and Hume. Kant defended Newton and the new physics when most of his compatriots, Goethe, for example, thought Newton’s views

14. For the classic, enthusiastic presentation of the Enlightenment as a whole, see Peter Gay’s *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Vintage, 1966).

Godless and vulgar and preferred biology and the life sciences as the paradigm of knowledge. And just as Kant defended the international and cosmopolitan values of the French and English Enlightenments, the German intellectuals were becoming increasingly obsessed with the idea of "folk Spirit" and a distinctively German culture. And while Kant was following the Enlightenment and trying to modernize and rationalize Christianity, many of his intellectual comrades and students were converting to Catholicism, precisely in order to reject the divisive attempts to modernize Christianity that had defined the German Reformation.¹⁵

In Germany the Enlightenment—the *Aufklärung*—never achieved the unchallenged ideological status it already enjoyed (and still enjoys) in England, America, and France. The bright new world of Enlightenment dimmed in the shadows of a culture devoted to the darker side of human nature, to *Faust* and mystery. While Napoleon was building the magnificent Madeleine in Paris, with the bright marble and clean simple lines of classical antiquity, the young intellectuals of Germany were rediscovering the Gothic cathedral—complex, mysterious, medieval, whose very purpose was to inspire mystery and awe and defy understanding. While the French rejected virtually the whole of history since the ancient Romans and Greeks as "dark ages," the young German poets began to look at that same past with a kind of nostalgia. And so, even if it is true that Enlightenment premises and promises were a source of inspiration to Hegel and his friends, it is equally true that they were affected by an extremely powerful anti-Enlightenment mood throughout Germany. In this sense, Kant was not so much of an influence as a foreign voice, more representative of the English and French philosophers than the Spirit of Germany.¹⁶

Whatever its cosmopolitan pretensions, the Enlightenment was in fact a class movement, a *bourgeois* ideology, whose slogans of universal equality and brotherhood had an immediate political advantage to those who were shouting them loudest: an increasingly large number of citizens in the cities (thus *bourgeois* or *Bürger*) who had no inheritance, land, or titles, who worked with their minds and their manners rather than their hands and filled the posts of lawyers, businessmen, accountants, clerks, teachers, professors, architects, merchants,

15. For example, Hegel's friend Schelling and the critics and poets of the "Romantic" circle in Jena at the turn of the century.

16. This is, of course, hyperbole; Kant's third *Critique*, *The Critique of Judgment* of 1790, was one of the primary philosophical vehicles of the whole German Romantic movement. But the work for which he is still best known in England and America—the first two "*Critiques*"—was distinctly foreign to the dominant German temperament of 1800.

tradesmen and managed the bureaucracies of Europe. In the language of equality and human rights they rejected the privileges of the aristocracy, criticized kings and princes, and gave themselves the right, once the revolution had done its business, to legislate for all humanity, in the name of reason and what they came to call "common sense." They raised their own occupations to the level of institutions; before they had only been service positions. In Germany, Geofferey Barraclough writes, "The only opportunities open to the middle class was in the service of the princes; and the only bourgeois element which found any scope within the system was therefore a class-conscious body of civil servants, lawyers, university teachers and profession placemen, who glorified the system which accorded their existence."¹⁷ Later, in Germany as in France, the bureaucracy and the bourgeois occupations would come to represent society as such.

If Enlightenment is the ideology of the middle class, then we can easily understand why the Enlightenment had such a distorted and truncated existence in Germany. The Enlightenment in England and France was primarily a political aspiration, but in Germany, under the petty princes or under Napoleon, political action was limited, revolution unthinkable. Germany, unlike England and France had a relatively small and impotent class of *Bürger*, who were scattered throughout 200 plus tiny states and principalities and were therefore without the implosive concentration of Paris and London. In England and France, secular values—good business in particular—had forced religion into second place in human affairs, but Germany was without a healthy mercantile class, and religion still held a primary place, if only because divine salvation was more available than secular success. To make matters all the more confusing, the feudal and petty princes of the German states often aped the conversational fashion of the French Enlightenment, even while they so offended its moral substance. Insofar as the anti-authoritarian sentiment in Germany had any real momentum, therefore, it tended to be directed *against* the Enlightenment as much as it was motivated by it. As a "movement," the *Aufklärung* represented the powers of oppression rather than the promise of liberation. (Frederick the Great, for example, was a good friend of Voltaire, and his conversation, as opposed to many of his domestic policies, was very "enlightened.") And again, the cosmopolitan attitudes of the Enlightenment may have appealed to the French, whose national identity was not in question, but it was exactly contrary to the growing aspirations of a great many Germans, for whom

17. Barraclough, *Origins*, p. 283.

the unity of humanity was a secondary concern. What they wanted far more was their own cultural identity, and only then an important place in Europe and society as a whole.

Romanticism

The world must be made romantic. Then once more we shall discover its original meaning. To make something romantic, . . . the lower self becomes identified with the higher self . . . Insofar as I render a higher meaning to what is ordinary, a mysterious appearance to what is customary, an infinite look to the finite, I am romanticizing. —Novalis

The name most often given to this anti-Enlightenment reaction, by its own authors in fact, was Romanticism. In the manifestoes of the turn of the century, Romanticism was promoted as essentially *modern*, despite its yearning for the middle ages (Schlegel, who invented the term, defined it as “the spirit of modern poetry,” for example.) It was, following the philosopher Herder, extremely folk-minded. It was tended to be anti-rational, thus dismissing philosophy in the name of poetry even as it launched into long philosophical tirades, following the greatest philosophers of the age and producing others in their own ranks. The Romantics followed Kant, but not the Kant who defended the Enlightenment so much as the Kant of the *Critique of Judgment*, who there defended the significance of aesthetics, talked about the role of genius, and presented a woolly picture of an evolving, living universe—very much at odds with the spirit of his other works. In general, Romanticism was defined defensively, belligerently, just as the Enlightenment had been defined by Voltaire and its early defenders in France, but now against Enlightenment. If the Enlightenment prided itself on its secular status, Romanticism made a conspicuous show of religion. If Enlightenment denied the past and celebrated the future, Romanticism would celebrate precisely that past. If the Enlightenment celebrated the ancients, then Romanticism would identify with the “barbarians.” If the Enlightenment prided itself on reason, the Romantics would place all of their emphasis on *passion*, and if the Enlightenment celebrated humanity and the cosmopolitan viewpoint, then the Romantics would worship the individual, the cult of genius (most of them thinking themselves geniuses, of course), and the ideals of the hero and the savior (though who among them this would be was not decided). The Enlightenment denied the signifi-

cance of individual cultures and local customs in the name of universal principles, so the Romantics celebrated precisely the local and the colorful. But if this seems small-minded in contrast to Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, the Romantics more than compensated with their appeal to the cosmic—the *infinite*. If the Enlightenment was primarily a political movement, the Romantics rejected politics almost totally, and instead celebrated the “inner” and infinite virtues of religion, morality, and aesthetic creativity.

This is the picture promulgated by the Romantics, and it is unfortunate that it has been accepted, in one form or another, by many of their commentators. Romanticism was a polemic, necessary perhaps but often extravagant and misleading. Enlightenment and Romanticism were in fact more complementary than antagonistic, alternative answers to similar questions in very different cultural settings. Both were bourgeois movements, despite the fact that the Enlightenment philosophers presented their case in unqualified universal terms, and the Romantics were extremely vocal in precisely their attack on bourgeois mediocrity and bourgeois values. Both were efforts toward self-realization; although this was first of all a political effort in Enlightenment France it was, due to their political impotence, an inward, more “spiritual” struggle for the Germans. The Enlightenment was nothing if not passionate, however the philosophers celebrated reason.

If the Enlightenment proselytized its universal humanism and its cosmopolitan attitudes, it is nevertheless from the Enlightenment, not from Romanticism, that we have inherited our strong sense of individualism, individual rights, and individual freedom. And however much the Romantics stressed the role of the exceptional individual, the hero and the genius, they also believed that the significance of such individuals was precisely their role as representatives and examples for all humanity, in fact, of World Spirit itself. If Voltaire once said that he found heroes “boring” while Romantic Byron began his *Don Juan* sarcastically declaring “I want a hero,” the difference, perhaps, was more that Voltaire assumed that he himself was one while Byron was still looking for his. The Enlightenment philosophers and the Romantics shared a philosophical hero too—Jean Jacques Rousseau, the single most important philosopher for Kant, for Herder, for Goethe, and for Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Both Enlightenment and Romanticism were declared to be “modern,” in contrast to the other, and if the Romantics turned to the middle ages as a source of inspiration we must not forget that the Enlightenment turned to the ancient Greeks and Romans for exactly the same purpose. (Classicism, which is often contrasted with Romanticism in the arts, might

be seen as the aesthetic equivalent of Enlightenment, and its vicissitudes in Europe following much the same patterns.) Both Enlightenment and Romanticism were bourgeois efforts to make a place for themselves in a particularly insecure world, the Enlightenment providing structure, promises, and principles to a violent world of revolution, the Romantics trying to inspire enthusiasm and vitality in a world of political stagnation and spiritual devastation.¹⁸

However excited he may have become on reading Voltaire and Rousseau, Hegel was directly inspired by Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and the German nationalists. However he may have lampooned the Romantics in the *Phenomenology*, he was their kindred spirit, if not exactly one of them, and his attacks on some of their pet themes, for example, their emphasis on feeling and intuitionism, was more a matter of stress than substance, and of little significance in the cross-fire of ideologies at the time. German Enlightenment and Romanticism, whatever their internal polemics (which were in no way distasteful to Hegel, who enjoyed them) were part of one and the same ideology, one and the same effort at self-realization, one and the same attempt to find dignity of self and a role in the new world, whatever it would be, that would replace the rotted and now demolished Holy Roman Empire, in the autumn of 1806. In Hegel's philosophy, Enlightenment and Romanticism play absolutely essential and complementary roles (which is not always evident in what he says *about* them).¹⁹

Poetry and Prophecy

Every extraordinary man has a mission to accomplish. If he has fulfilled it, he is no longer needed upon this earth in the same form, and Providence uses him for something else. —J. Goethe

Everything human must slowly rise, unfold and ripen —Schiller.

In France the "philosophers" attacked most traditional philosophy, especially metaphysics. The German romantic poets, on the other hand,

18. Not surprisingly, the watchword of the romantic movement, was "enthusiasm." Madame de Staël used it and demonstrated it in her every sentence; the poets wrote enthusiastic odes to it, and it was commonly asserted, by every romantic from Schlegel to Nietzsche to Disraeli, as well as by both Kant and Hegel, as Hegel put it, "nothing great is possible without enthusiasm" (in his Introduction to *The Philosophy of History*, trans. R.S. Hartman as *Reason in History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953).

19. Both discussions in the *Phenomenology* in chapter 6 are distinctly unflattering, especially the discussion of "Enlightenment." But it is one of Hegel's more annoying traits that he criticizes most vocally and distinguishes from his own thinking precisely those authors and movements which in fact contributed the most to it.

attacked philosophy, but in the name of a metaphysics that extolled poetry, not metaphysics, as the mother tongue of truth. The battle between Enlightenment and Romanticism thus produced an embarrassingly artificial and confused conflict between philosophy and poetry. It was not a new conflict (Plato urged the expulsion of the poets in the name of philosophy). And yet, in Germany at least, they both were expressions of self-aspiration, the non-political equivalent of revolution in France, the vehicle of redemption, with philosophers and poets alike as prophets. Hegel's friends Hölderlin and Schelling had already taken up the redeemer's robes, one through poetry with a philosophical base, the other through metaphysics in defense of poetry. And if Hegel's *Phenomenology* strikes the American reader as closer to poetry than what we (in our English Enlightenment tradition) call philosophy, far richer in imagery and connotations than strict definition and argument, it is because poetry and philosophy in Germany were to serve one and the same end, to present a picture of the universe in which one's own place would be defined, and a mythical past harmony, long since lost, was about to be recaptured.

The pivotal figure in this prophetic confrontation of philosophy and poetry, and a powerful influence on Hegel, is Friedrich Schiller. On the one hand, Schiller was an extremely close friend and collaborator with Goethe; on the other, he was a student of Kant's philosophy and thus in a particularly favorable position to forge the synthesis between poetry and philosophy, between Goethe and Kant, and to set the stage for the prophetic union of the two. He combined the moral fervor of Kant (and later Fichte) with the artistic enthusiasm of Goethe (and later Schelling). He too had been one of the *Sturm und Drang* poets, and his precocious play *The Robbers* had been a powerful influence on the growth of Romanticism in Germany, like Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. He too had given up that rebellious sentimentality for a more disciplined classicism—"freedom within limitation" Goethe called it—and looked to the ancient Greeks as a kind of ideal. And all of this he tempered with Kant's philosophy, forging a vision that brought together the confused aspirations of a young and struggling society, torn by conflicting ideologies and seeking an identity of its own.

The vision is complex, as it would have had to be, drawing not only on *Sturm und Drang* enthusiasm and ancient ideals, on Kant and Goethe, but the whole of the German experience toward the end of that century, after the French Revolution but before the emergencies wrought by Napoleon. Schiller shared with Goethe the emphasis on what we may call the "growth metaphor" (or *Bildung*), drawn from biology and

Aristotelean cosmology, rendered in the terms of modern metaphysics in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and, a few years later, to become Hegel's "dialectic." Schiller shared the sense of momentous and imminent change. But like many Germans, he had been stunned by the turn of the French Revolution to Terror, and so he too turned away from political aspirations to a more personal ideal, what we might call "the whole person," as Schiller envisioned the citizens of ancient Athens, at one with themselves, society, and nature. The French Revolution had shown, as philosophers had suspected, that modern humanity was incapable of handling freedom, that we would have to be "cultivated" in morality and aesthetics before we could be capable of any political "liberation." In his *Letters on Aesthetic Education* in 1794, Schiller used Kant's third *Critique* and a suggestion from Hölderlin to argue that our sense of beauty was the synthesis and necessary condition for the good life, and "aesthetic education" the means to achieve that moral capacity for freedom that the French evidently still lacked.²⁰ Unlike lesser minds, Schiller did not try to reduce the whole of human experience to a single sphere, whether aesthetic, moral, cognitive, or religious, but argued that all function together as integral parts of the whole person. It is this sense of *synthesis* and "harmony," so essential in times of conflict, that would be Schiller's most powerful influence on the young poets and philosophers of 1800.

The ideal of "harmony" was not without its political side; the problem for the Germans was how to realize the single political ideal that structured virtually all of their thinking. That ideal was the Greek *polis*, the small city-state, in which every citizen was both a "human being" and a "member" of the state, an autonomous individual and an inextricable part of the larger tissue. The ideal of "harmony" in other words, was not so much concerned with individuals as it was concerned with the whole life of a people within an ideal community. Thus the ambiguity of the word "*Bildung*," between growth (education) and "culture" is particularly revealing: an individual or a society grows only so far as it "cultivates" itself, becomes part of a culture. Politics too, therefore, becomes not so much a matter of abstract political principles ("liberty, equality, fraternity") as development as a "natural" whole according to its own "internal" principles, an aesthetic ideal rather than a political one. This is true not only of individuals and societies but even of humanity as a whole. (Thus Hegel, in the *Phenomenology*, will suggest that each person goes through the stages of growth that the whole of humanity has endured through

20. Schiller's *Letters* are translated as *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* by Reginald Snell (New York: Ungar, 1965).

“world history.” “Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” in phenomenology as well as in biology.)

Bildung is a metaphor. So is this concept of “harmony.” They are as much images as ideas; in fact, they are “Ideas” in Kant’s special sense—ideals without which life would be impossible but, nevertheless, they themselves are impossible too, never to be known as such, never to be realized. It is this distinction, so firmly rooted in Kant, between the limited and knowable and the ideal and unknowable that sets the poets and philosophers of 1800 off and running, to grasp, as Kant insisted they could not, what they called “the infinite.” The more technical aspects of this ambition will have to wait until the next chapter, but the idea, as far as the spirit of the times was concerned, was simple enough; life gets defined through its metaphors, and if philosophers could not define and defend them, then it would have to be up to the poets. Someone had to do it, for the sake of “humanity” (itself a metaphor, of course, not a literal entity). But the ultimate metaphor was this—*life as a unified and harmonious whole*, and nothing less.

A metaphor is an image that cannot be stated literally without some sense of absurdity. Thus they are “Ideas” in Kant’s sense—they regulate our lives but cannot be literally understood.²¹ This did not mean, as many of the Romantics insisted, that they could not be described or defended. The various claims to the effect that philosophy could not “grasp the infinite” was a misreading of Kant, to the benefit of the poets. But metaphor is just as much the province of philosophy as poetry, and whatever Hegel’s outspoken objections to mere images (*Vorstellungen*) and the need for the Concept (*Begriff*), we can only understand his philosophy—and the thought of the times in general—in terms of the grand metaphors so central to all German thinking at the time. Whether this aids poetry at the expense of philosophy or philosophy at the expense of poetry is no longer a dispute worth disputing.

The reigning metaphor is *Bildung*, that sense of quasi-biological growth and development, like a seedling growing into a tree, not by virtue of “external” forces (wind, soil conditions, etc.)—though they will be of some considerable effect—but by virtue of its own inherent nature (its genetic composition, for example, but Hegel couldn’t have understood much of that). It is a metaphor that defines the whole structure of the *Phenomenology* and recurs over and over again. It is

21. Kant used the phrase “regulative ideas” to refer to those doctrines, such as the rationality and ultimate comprehensibility of the world and the hope that justice would finally prevail, which, on the one hand, had to be believed by any rational person but, on the other, could not be proven to be true, as principles of knowledge.

to be found in Kant's philosophy, in Goethe's poetry, and, most importantly, in the very sense of existence at the turn of the century, when the only way of coping with the turmoil and uncertainty was some sense of "destiny," of a new world coming into being, as if Napoleon and war were but necessary growth pains. The goal of the metaphor *Bildung* is in turn the metaphor (or "the Idea") of wholeness or totality, empty in itself ("the Night in which all cows are Black"—Hegel mocks Schelling)²² but necessary nevertheless as an ideal—for knowledge, for morality, for art and religion (which is sometimes defined as just this sense of totality). The idea of "a whole person" is also a metaphor, not a measurable quantity, but its literal contrast is clear enough: Even in 1790, Schiller could begin to despise the disintegration of human life in the bureaucracy (over a century before Kafka), the limitation of experience, and the numbing of moral and aesthetic faculties (years before sex and violence on television), and "alienation" (later described by Hegel, then Marx). It is doubtful that there ever existed or even could exist a real "whole person" (as Schiller described Goethe, though more out of flattery than fact), but that made it no less an ideal, no less desirable, and no less necessary—as an ideal.²³

From the Enlightenment, however, there was a competing metaphor, which found its place primarily in Kant, but in altered forms in Schiller and the philosophers Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel as well. It is the image of *autonomy*, which is sometimes referred to as "infinity" too. Autonomy was the image of self-containment, the resistance to all "external" determination. (The political analogues were obvious even at the time.) This "self-determination," however, was not to be construed as a particularly individual concept—the "freedom of the individual" from interference by others, whether individuals or the state. Autonomy meant the ability of the individual to discover for himself or herself the universal rules of morality, or science, or aes-

22. The phrase occurs in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*; Hegel uses it to refer to the vacuity of such simple-minded cosmic slogans as "all is One," despite the fact that, ultimately, he too insists on just such a conclusion as the "result" of his philosophy.

23. It is important to insist that Schiller's "whole person" *always* referred to a person integrated into a harmonious society. The most important difference between his conception and our own—and one of the greatest stumbling blocks to our understanding of this period in Germany in general—is the German rejection of the idea of isolated, individual human beings; we, on the other hand, take as our foremost heroes men and women who have cut themselves off from society and declared themselves wholly autonomous. These thinkers believed in liberty and autonomy, but always within a community; and if they also celebrated outcasts and criminals (e.g. Schiller's *Robbers* and Hölderlin's "misplaced" *Hyperion*), they were also outcasts precisely because they found that the society in which they found themselves was distinctly unharmonious and antithetical to one's integration in it as a "whole person."

thetics, and it meant moreover the autonomy of the *community* in which individuals were members. It is the community, and, ultimately, the whole of human "spirit" that becomes autonomous, according to Hegel, not the individual. Indeed, the tension between the whole and the individual, the "universal" and "the particular," would be a point of considerable tension in German Idealism. But whatever its subject, the goal of Enlightenment, and in Hegel, the goal of *Bildung* and the *Phenomenology*, is rational autonomy, self-realization according to reason.²⁴

To call these crucial philosophical ideals "metaphors" is not at all to dismiss them. In fact, it would not be at all un-Hegelian to insist that metaphors are more primary to our thinking than literal understanding. The Enlightenment, just as much as the mysteries of Romanticism, was a metaphor. "Progress" is a metaphor and so is the German sense of "mission," their sense of "redemption," and the grand abstraction "*humanity*." "The whole" is ultimately a metaphor and so is "the Absolute" and—years before our modern mathematical theories—the concept of "infinity." But to say that these are metaphors is only to say that their "truth" is in their role in human experience (which perhaps too is a metaphor), that to demand too strict a definition of them will almost always yield either platitudes or nonsense. Thus Aristotle insisted that we should not demand more precision of a subject than it is capable of giving us, and the "spirit of the times", in Germany in 1800, was notoriously imprecise, as the guidelines to human life had also become notoriously imprecise. What they wanted was a set of ideals, edification, and encouragement, not hard-headed analysis. And so to say that their philosophies were built on metaphors is not to demean them but rather to point out something that is notoriously missing from much philosophy today—a sense of vision, a set of inspiring images, a grand "speculative" attempt to make sense of the world. To provide that vision, to "save humanity," to make sense of this new, exciting, terrifying world, and whether through philosophy or poetry, this was the united task of the German intellectuals. It was Hegel who was most successful, but his difference with

24. Charles Taylor, in his two books on Hegel, draws a portrait of the period using the somewhat oversimplified dualism between what he calls (following Isaiah Berlin) "expressivism" and "rational autonomy," roughly, Herder and the Romantics on the one side and Kant and the Enlightenment on the other. But this dualism is both too limited and too all-inclusive; Romanticism and Enlightenment were not so opposed as they sometimes seemed, and, in any case, the confusing interplay of forces and opinions of this period can hardly be reduced to two coherent factions. Schiller, in particular, was the champion both of liberty and rational autonomy, on the one hand, and the foremost spokesman for the importance of poetic expression in the realization of human perfectibility.

the poets and Romantic philosophers was far less substantial than their very basic agreement in the nature of what had to be done.²⁵

Nature and Spirit: Hölderlin's Grand Metaphor

All drink joy from Mother Nature
All she suckled at her breast
Good or evil, every creature
Follows where her foot is pressed.

—Schiller, *Ode to Joy* (Beethoven's text in his 9th Symphony.)

One way of describing what had to be done was “the synthesis of Nature and Spirit,” but this again is a technical problem in philosophy which has much broader significance for society as a whole. The new humanism had replaced both the old naturalism and traditional religion, particularly in France, where the Revolution destroyed whatever faith might have been left in either the intrinsic goodness of human nature or the watchful eye of God on man. As for nature as such, its sudden eclipse before the bright new sun of human affairs was already so evident in England, in the early days of the industrial revolution. Humanity no longer had to cope with nature, fitting in and surviving as best we could; nature now served humanity, providing raw materials, new territories, and battlefields. This was nowhere more evident than in the new aesthetics of the “sublime,” in Edmund Burke and Kant, for example, in which the once dangerous and ominous threats of natural wilderness now became “majestic” and “inspiring” objects for our enjoyment and artistic appreciation. Mountains once presented obstacles; they now provided scenic rides and picturesque landscapes. The roaring sea was once a boundary and a treacherous challenge; now it was to be viewed with detachment and appreciation. When Fichte announced in his philosophy that nature was nothing but a stage for human endeavors, or when Schelling defended his thesis that nature was but part of the cosmic artwork, they were not expressing a view that was all that different from the general and still prevailing attitude toward nature. The threats of this world were now for the most part human, and if there were still famines

25. Thus Richard Kroner discusses the young Hegel as a “romantic” in his Introduction to *Hegel's Early Theological Writings*, translated by T.M. Knox (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1948), while H.S. Harris in his *Hegel's Development* emphasizes Hegel's heritage from (as well as criticism of) the Enlightenment. Both views are entirely correct, and it is the distinction between the two movements, not Hegel's confusion or synthetic genius, that deserves criticism.

and occasional earthquakes, they would be considered more the impertinence of a usually obedient servant rather than the authority of a masterly nature.

And yet, the German ideal typically stressed "man's unity with nature," a unity that seemed to have been lost in the complexities of modern society. Urban human life had domesticated nature, reduced it to the small plots and preserves called "parks" and caged it in zoos. In this perspective, Hegel's Swiss Alpine hikes are not of mere incidental interest; we can see him, like Rousseau wandering through the forests of St. Germain, at peace with the world and away from striving and struggling humanity, at least for the weekend. Accordingly, the poets and philosophers made a myth out of the country, the "simplicities" of rural life, the "natural" life.²⁶

By 1800, then, the citizens of the cities of Europe experienced a sense of "alienation" that would have been unimaginable only a few decades before, a sense of detachment from nature, a sense of its utter *irrelevance* to human concerns. With this in mind, Fichte's philosophy, for example, is not nearly so incomprehensible as it might be otherwise; nature "in itself" means very little to us in our sense of ourselves. Schelling was outraged by Fichte's easy dismissal of the whole of nature and science, but his own view also rendered nature an intrinsic part of the human world, even if "in itself" as well.²⁷ Nature had been conquered; it now threatened to become all but extinct as well.

A similar "alienation" was evident in the vacuum of what once had been an all-powerful religion that dictated even the minutest details of people's lives. By 1800, Christianity was but an institution. God was too abstract, too far away, too "transcendent." One could reach out to him, but the business of the world was far too immediate, what Hegel calls in the *Phenomenology* "the preoccupation with the sensuous . . . like worms, contenting themselves with dirt and water." In this new world of wholly human hopes and conflicts, then, one of the necessary tasks of philosophy would have to be to bring nature and religion

26. John McDermott, in his *Culture of Experience: Philosophical Essays in the American Grain* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976), makes the good point that no comparable mythology has been developed about the city—except that it is decadent, dirty, dangerous, etc. He is talking about America, but the same point applies well in early 19th-century Germany, and, of course, to 18th-century Paris.

27. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) was one of the foremost followers of Kant and an immediate influence on Schelling and thus, one step removed, on Hegel. We shall discuss him at some length in the next chapter but, in a phrase, his philosophy consisted in putting all of the emphasis on morality, thus relegating to secondary place (as a stage for human moral action) the whole of nature.

back into human life in some relevant way. The problem was given a certain technical posture by the fact that Kant made a brutal distinction between the world of knowledge and nature and the world of morality and faith, but despite the centrality of the demand to "systematize" Kant among the post-Kantians, the drive behind this technical demand was a very real and common concern for the place of Nature and Spirit in the new world of human affairs.

It is at this point that we should introduce the single most powerful influence on Hegel's vision in the *Phenomenology*: Friedrich Hölderlin. They met in 1789–90 and roomed together in a loft in Tübingen the following year. They were the same age, shared many of the same interests, and quickly became fast friends. Even as a student, Hölderlin began to prove his poetic genius, and by 1800 he was recognized by Goethe and Schiller as an extremely "promising" young writer. But in fact, his works of genius had already been written, if not fully appreciated by those two poetic tyrants in Weimar.²⁸

Hölderlin did not by himself invent the grand metaphor of the age, which was soon to find its way into the greatest philosophy book of the new century,—Hegel's *Phenomenology*. He drew it from the whole culture around him, from Goethe and Schiller and the Lutheran theology, from Kant and Fichte, from Klopstock and the early *Sturm und Drang* poets and, perhaps most of all, from his reading of the ancient Greeks. It is an image which seems foreign to us, but it would have seemed almost common-sensical to his generation; it is this: the image of a universal spiritual force, which manifests itself in all things and uses them to its own purposes. The spirit has no existence of its own, if by that we mean some independent status apart from its various manifestations in the world—like the traditional Judeo-Christian God, who exists apart from and existed before his creation. But yet, on Hölderlin's view, *everything* is a manifestation of the divine Spirit—the cockroach on the wall, the tragedies of human history, the conventions of civilized society, and the words and inspirations of the poet. And since everything is a manifestation of spirit, everything too, no matter how seemingly pointless or devoid of meaning to us, has its necessary place in the over-all scheme of things.

The grand metaphor is one of *effusion*, cosmic spirit making itself known to us and to itself through its use of nature, human history and, most of all, the spiritual sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and po-

28. For a good discussion of Hölderlin, see Christopher Middleton's Introduction to his translations of Hölderlin in *Hölderlin and Mörike* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972) and Michael Hamburger, *Reason and Energy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), ch. 1. Also, Agnes Stansfield, *Hölderlin* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1944).

etry in particular. He, Hölderlin, is a spokesman for the divine. His poetry is divinely inspired, but he is only a vehicle, used by the Spirit. Goethe had employed a similar metaphor, but by way of a more personal “demon.” Hegel would also see himself as a spokesman for Spirit, but for him, more than for Hölderlin, that Spirit is distinctly human. But it is Hölderlin who raises this vision of all-encompassing or “absolute” Spirit realizing itself through all of us, infusing nature as its physical manifestation, pervading human history as the path of its self-realization, and speaking through the poets as a way of finally coming to realize who and what “it” is, namely, everything. But for Hölderlin, “everything” has a distinctly spiritual hue. There is no such thing as mere matter, dull nature as an impersonal Newtonian mechanism. There is no mere contingency to human history (“one damn thing after another” according to poet John Masefield). Nature itself is spiritual. Humanity and human history are spiritual. And God, who had been denied by the more atheistic thinkers of the Enlightenment, now re-emerges in nature and human history.

The Role of Religion

Through the bath of its revolution . . . I think it would be interesting to disturb the theologians as much as possible in their ant-like industry as they amass critical building materials to strengthen their Gothic temple, to make everything difficult for them, to whip them out of every nook and subterfuge till they . . . had to show their nakedness in the daylight. —Hegel, letter to Schelling (1795)

The period that concerns us is often characterized in a very different way, as *the breakdown of religion* and the chaos that follows. Of course, religion had been “breaking down” for many years, even before the Reformation, but the Enlightenment in England and France contributed more than its share to the near-total secularization of human life. I want to challenge this too common view on at least two counts; first, it is a negative view, like talking about the “Fall of the Roman Empire” without asking what replaced it (“dark ages” won’t do—a classicist conceit: in fact, the “barbarians” who replaced Rome were those we now proudly call “Europeans”). If religion collapsed, it was because something more powerful and more attractive had replaced it, the “new world” we keep alluding to, a world in which human happiness, human dignity, human autonomy reign supreme. Second, the idea of a religious breakdown ignores the internal development

of Christianity itself—although whether this represents progress or regress depends on your point of view. The question of the role of religion in modern society is essential because Hegel is typically viewed as a Christian philosopher, in fact, a philosopher whose main concern was the defense and “rationalization” of Christianity. And so we shall have to come back to this question again and again.²⁹

The demise of religion was the beginning of a new world, a thoroughly human world. Hegel, in particular, was very concerned with and disdainful of the whole traditional opposition of God and man, which he viewed as nothing less than a “Master-Slave” relation which made impossible human dignity. Before him, Kant, whose piety was never in question, insisted that religion be wholly subservient to morality, a “postulate of practical reason,” thus dramatically reducing its status from absolute to derivative and dependent. Before Kant, Hume had written a devastating set of arguments against even this conservative enterprise in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,³⁰ and, of course, there were many who would say that even Luther half destroyed Christianity by turning it inward, rejecting church authority, and secularizing its spirit. But the reasoning behind all of this seems to me far more important than the survival of religion as such. The question, “what good is religion if it doesn’t make us happier and more virtuous?”—a common question in the later 18th century—would not have been comprehensible five hundred years before. Faith was obligatory, happiness a fleeting illusion. If Aquinas labored to reconcile Christianity with Aristotle’s humanism, it was never by challenging Christianity in the name of pagan happiness. With the Enlightenment, faith was on the defensive, and from the humanistic point of view, quite rightly so.³¹

Within the Christian religion, however, the seeds of secularization

29. Hegel’s philosophy of religion is extensively discussed in J.M.E. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1901), and more recently in Emil Fackenheim’s *The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967). I have argued against the religious interpretation in my “The Secret of Hegel: Kierkegaard’s Complaint” (*Philosophical Forum*, 1978), which forms the skeleton of Chapter 9 here.

30. David Hume, of whom we shall say something in the next chapter, was a leading Scottish philosopher of the Enlightenment. His *Dialogues* were so militantly atheistic that he prudentially put off publication until after his death, in 1776.

31. Even Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* of 1793, for which he was chastised by the censors, undermined huge portions of Christian dogma while also claiming to defend them. Hegel’s own early writings, greatly influenced by Kant, were very much anti-Christian, and in the *Phenomenology*, when his position has become more conciliatory, he blames the enlightenment—his own early influences—for its overkill in matters of religion. In attacking superstition, the Enlightenment seemed to have attacked all vestiges of supra-individual meaningfulness as well, leaving, in Hegel’s view, a spiritual void.

can be traced back to the beginnings. Judaism, whatever else it was, began as an attempt to cope with everyday life; it was a religion of laws and practices rather than theology and faith. Jesus, Hegel argued in his early years, was fundamentally a *moralist*, and in the 4th century, Saint Augustine fought an eventually losing battle with the English monk Pelagius, who defended the importance of "good works" as well as faith in Christianity. Augustine saw that in Pelagius lay the seeds of destruction for faith, and he was right. The "Pelagian heresy" increasingly humanized Christianity, until the Enlightenment completed the long process by insisting that religion, like art, morality, and science, was a purely *human* institution. The philosopher Spinoza, who had enormous influence in Germany around the time of Hegel's youth (a hundred years after Spinoza's death), had woven an image of a single "pantheistic" universe, in which God was nothing other than his creation; and the philosopher Fichte, just older than Hegel, went so far as to suggest that God was nothing other than the human moral order. But what makes all of this confusing is the fact that virtually all of these thinkers, except a few of the French atheists and David Hume, continued to call themselves "religious" and use traditional religious terminology. Spinoza still called the universe ("the One Substance") "God," and Fichte sometimes employed figures from the Trinity in his arguments. We have already seen that even Goethe used the language of "salvation" and the "redemption" and so, when Hegel uses similar language, including his most central word, "Spirit," we must be extremely cautious.³² Sometimes, he and his colleagues define religion as nothing other than a concern for "the infinite," but as we have anticipated, this may have minimal significance for what has usually been called religion. In fact, on such a view, the existence of God can be reduced to a mere tautology, a falsely pious way of saying that "there is indeed a universe."

And yet, the theologian Karl Barth has said without hesitation that Hegel's ambition was to be the Protestant Aquinas, and generations of Hegel scholars have taken his Christian ambitions, however unorthodox, to be the very heart of his philosophy. But the spirit of the times was going the other way, despite the counter-current of Catholic conversions among the Romantics. Hegel, of all philosophers, was a self-conscious spokesman for his times. The problems of religion were now corollaries to the ideals of humanism, and if the language

32. A number of years later, even such vehement atheists as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche would continue to use the language of "redemption" and "spirit." These terms are as deeply engrained in the German philosophical vocabulary as the traditional concepts of Greek philosophy ("substance," "category," "soul") and as such indicate very little about the actual content of their thinking.

of Christianity still pervaded German philosophy, the substance had long ago been altered beyond recognition. A historian, perhaps, looking at the long and extremely varied tradition from Augustine and Pelagius to Luther and Kant, might be willing to say, with some qualification, that Hegel was still a Christian, in the much revised sense of that term. But as philosophers, looking ahead to the *coup de grace* by Feuerbach and Marx, we can just as easily say that Hegel was one of the first great philosophical humanists in a time when the world itself had become thoroughly humanized.

Chapter Two

From Kant to Hegel

Kant is the basis and the point of departure for the whole of modern German philosophy. —Hegel, *Logic*

Hegel read widely in philosophy, both as a student and, more impressively, after he had graduated. He was, to say the least, an eclectic thinker, who would have admitted quite self-consciously that his influences included virtually the whole of Western thought.¹ And some Eastern thoughts too.² One can trace his major metaphysical ideas to the pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece (Stace)³ or to Aristotle (Mure,⁴ Weiss⁵) or to Spinoza, who was enjoying an underground revival in Germany. (Lessing, Jacobi, Fichte, Schleiermacher, and Schelling were all Spinoza enthusiasts.) And of course, one can trace many of Hegel's ideas to Rousseau and other Enlightenment philosophers in England and France, as well as Germany, and to the usually woolly thoughts of the German Romantic poets, Herder, and the historians, and to the theological theories he studied as a student at Tübingen.⁶ But the philosophical tradition in which Hegel emerged

1. He says as much, even at the outset of his career, in his 1801 essay, "*Differenz des Ficht-schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*." *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (S.U.N.Y. Press, Albany, 1977), esp. 114 ff (*Differenz*-essay). The definitive statement, of course, are his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (in three volumes, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1955), in which he portrays himself as the culmination of the whole of the history of thought. (*Lectures*).

2. For example, in the first volume of his *Lectures* and in his (dubious) references to the Hindus in the third volume of his *Encyclopaedia*.

3. Walter Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: Dover, 1955).

4. G.R.G. Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965).

5. Frederick Weiss, *Hegel's Critique of Aristotle's Philosophy of Mind* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969).

6. For an excellent study of Hegel's place in the midst of Romanticism, see M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*. The classic study of Hegel and his poet friend Hölderlin is *Hegel und Hölderlin* by J. Tübingen, 1831), and more recently, Dieter Henrich in his *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt, 1971). A detailed account of Hegel's studies is Har-

was most immediately dominated and defined by one philosopher alone, Immanuel Kant. It was Kant's view of religion as a function of "practical reason," i.e. morality, that provoked Hegel's first serious philosophical polemics, and it was Kant's ethics that provided his first philosophical position as such. Ultimately it was the whole of Kant's magnificent revolution in philosophy that made Hegel's system possible. Hegel's technical apparatus and language are almost wholly Kantian. The approach his system assumes, the problems in philosophy it tries to solve, and most importantly, what it simply takes for granted, can only be understood in the context of Kant and his most immediate critics, in particular Fichte, Schelling, and the self-styled "Romantic" philosophers.⁷

On the one hand, the problems facing Kant and his critics are extremely technical—problems created by philosophers for other philosophers. But they are also manifestations of the "spirit of the times," very human problems which can be restated in quite ordinary language. My aim in this chapter, therefore, will be to try to capture the *sense* of these very difficult authors, in a simple but, it is hoped, not too simple-minded way, for those many readers of Hegel who are quite reasonably not willing to postpone their reading until they have mastered the whole of German philosophy.

Kant too was a creature of his time. In introductory philosophy classes, we learn about Kant as a disembodied philosophical synthesizer, anxious to recast the philosophy of Leibniz he learned when he was in school in such a way as to meet the skeptical criticisms of David Hume. But Kant was also an amateur scientist and astronomer, a self-appointed spokesman for the Enlightenment, an unflagging enthusiast of the French Revolution, a pious Lutheran, a moralistic puritan, a virgin, an entertaining wit, a lover of good sherry. His use of Leibniz and his answer to Hume were but parts of a much broader campaign, not only in philosophy, and not only in the spirit of the Enlightenment, but in the wake of Luther's Reformation, with its own stress on piety, autonomy, the rejection of church authority, the emphasis on faith and "good works" and the moral aspect of religion. In fact, Kant's synthesis of Leibniz and Hume—or the two quarreling movements called "rationalism" and "empiricism" respectively—was one of his more minor contributions *within* the Enlightenment tradition. His most

ris's *Hegel's Development* (which I will be citing frequently in the next chapter). A schematic overview is in Charles Taylor's *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975).

7. The standard study of Hegel in his context is Richard Kroner's *Von Kant bis Hegel* (Tübingen, 1921) and more recently, D. Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext*.

important work—particularly in its German context—was the radical revamping of just that tradition itself.⁸

The movement chartered by Kant and subsequently adopted by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel has generally been called “German Idealism.” Idealism, simply defined, is the philosophy that the world depends upon “ideas,” that objects exist only insofar as they are objects of consciousness. Idealism denies the independent existence of the physical world and insists instead that the world is, in some sense, a product of the activity of consciousness. The word “activity” is crucial here, for there are also forms of idealism, some of which were popular in England at the time, which insisted that the world consisted of “ideas” but gave no particular role to our own conscious activity in the production of them.⁹ This theme, on the other hand, would be absolutely central to Kant and to those who followed him.

The very idea of idealism must seem extremely odd to the American reader, who has been brought up in the common-sense tradition of the English Enlightenment and the nuts-and-bolts thinking of the “pioneer” tradition. We tend to think in terms of particular problems, practical problems, and the idea of the world as something “in our minds” seems to our way of thinking an utterly ridiculous philosophical starting point. But even in our emphasis on “practice,” our own ideas and intentions are obviously instrumental in “setting up” the problem, as well as the solution, and this is perhaps the way to begin to appreciate what this very foreign philosophical tradition is after.¹⁰ The question is, to what extent and in what way are we responsible for “setting up” our world? If we think of ourselves in a great European or American city, for example, it is obvious that virtually everything we see, except perhaps a small patch of grass or sky, has been literally created by human beings, conceived and designed, as well as

8. Thus Heinrich Heine's famous description of Kant in his *Religion and Philosophy in Germany: A Fragment*, in which he rightly compares Kant to Robespierre: “the same inexorable cutting prosaic sober sense of honor and integrity,” “the same talent for distrust,” the same “bourgeois” personality, and the same cataclysmic effects on the whole of their respective worlds (*Werke*, V, 137, trans. John Snodgrass (London, 1981)).

9. One example, of course, would have been Bishop George Berkeley, who preceded Hegel by the better part of a century; but one might also cite the so-called British Hegelians who followed him, almost a century later, including F.H. Bradley and J.M.E. McTaggart.

10. The American representative of this position is John Dewey, who openly acknowledged his debt to Hegel. With the general eclipse of Hegel's philosophy in America, it is sometimes difficult to remember that much of early American philosophy was essentially Hegelian, including not only that of Dewey but Josiah Royce and a whole “school” of Hegelians in St. Louis, in the days when that city was still the “gateway” to the unexplored West. Indeed, as I shall argue later on, the “pragmatist” aspect of Hegel is extremely strong, as Royce and Dewey were well aware. See, e.g., W. Goetzman, *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in Western America* (New York: Knopf, 1973).

built, through the resources of the human mind. This is not yet idealism, of course, but this simple urban fact is the beginning of an insight that will make the work of the idealists much more sympathetic to us: the world is a human world, the product of human consciousness.

Idealism is a philosophical expression, in extreme forms, of this very modern viewpoint. It is an attempt to reinterpret the whole of our shared experience as, in some sense, the product of human consciousness, rather than the “given” effects of a world which already exists, “in and for itself,” independently of us. But this leads the German Idealists to begin with two sets of expectations which, to us, at first seem wholly unfamiliar: first, there is the expectation that the “true” philosophical account of the way the world “really” is will have little similarity to common sense, and display only the most tenuous connections with everyday experience. Second, it is to be expected that philosophy will put an enormous stress on experience itself, on consciousness, and on powers of consciousness that seem, from a common-sense point of view, to be absurd.

The peculiarity of philosophical systems, in their various attempts to describe the way the world “really” is, “behind” the appearances, is, of course, as old as philosophy itself. When Thales said, “everything is water,” no doubt he was thought to be making no sense at all; but it is only a difference in subtlety from that first crude attempt to the fantastic pictures of the universe we now accept, if not understand, in Einstein, Heisenberg, and our modern cosmologists. It is the first step into philosophy—indeed, perhaps, it is the entrance requirement—that we recognize a certain incoherence in our accounts of the world, a certain inadequacy in our common-sense perspectives. And so we develop a model, to rectify the incoherence, to fill in the conceptual gaps. The model runs into trouble, both in its confrontation with alternative philosophical models and in its confrontation with common sense; counter-examples are suggested, new inconsistencies discovered, and sometimes the metaphorical connotations of a model are incompatible with feelings and prejudices which are at least as important to us as “truth.” And so it is revised, throughout the career of every philosopher, and throughout the history of philosophy, always with an eye to the problems, but also, always with an eye to the times, its emotional needs as well as ideological demands.

The apt example, and the forerunner of the German Idealists from Kant to Hegel, is the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), the first universal genius of Germany and, perhaps, the last in Europe. He was a scientist, mathematician, diplomat, theologian, and,

in the best sense of the word, a metaphysician. He discovered the calculus before Newton and invented one of the first computers. He defended the Enlightenment, traveled widely, suggested the possibility of a single international language, and looked forward to the day when all human disputes could be settled with a simple “calculation.” In his metaphysics, Leibniz developed a fantastic picture of the way the world “really” is, almost a fairy tale in its seeming childish imaginative simplicity, but built into its every proposition was, in effect, the whole history of philosophy and the collective aspirations of modern Europe. He suggested that the world actually was composed of a plurality of substances, which he called “monads,” each one a living consciousness separated totally from every other monad but precisely coordinated with them by the super-monad, God. Immediately, the picture shows us that Leibniz is concerned, as the whole Enlightenment was concerned, with the autonomy of individuals, the problem of their separation (or what Hegel and Marx would call their “alienation”) and the need to believe in some ultimate harmony and rationality of the whole, in this case, guaranteed by God. And that means that everything happens for a good reason—a doctrine Leibniz called “The Principle of Sufficient Reason.” The model has built into it a host of laborious distinctions and requirements inherited from other philosophers, e.g.: the idea that “substances” are necessarily independent and cannot interact with one another; the idea that the explanation of the activities of a monad must be “internal”—in terms of what it is trying to do—instead of merely external—in terms of the laws of Newtonian physics. (Both these ideas would have momentous importance for the German Idealists.) Leibniz was also trying to support common-sense hopes and demands, for example, that everything happens for a reason, that every event has its meaning as well as its causes, and that the world, in God’s hands, was as good as it could possibly be (“the best of all possible worlds”). His philosophical system was an attempt, then, to give a behind-the-scenes account of the world of ordinary experience, provide an answer to both real life concerns and technical philosophical problems, all tied together in an imaginative, ingenious, and hopefully complete and coherent package of ideas and images. And if we have lost our taste for such systems, perhaps that is indeed a loss. Alfred North Whitehead, for example, once wrote that “the decline of speculative philosophy is one of the symptoms of the decline of civilization.”

The second feature of German Idealism that must be understood in terms of its long history is its almost obsessive emphasis on consciousness, or what the idealists sometimes call “subjectivity” or “ego.”

On the one hand, this obsession is a logical product of a common-sense proposition, namely, that everything we know about the world comes to us through our experience or through ideas, in other words, through consciousness. But this common-sense belief must in turn be explained. (The Greek philosophers, for example, would not even have understood it.) A large part of the explanation comes from Christianity, with its emphasis on the spirit and the “inner” resources of humanity. The Reformation, in particular, rejected the “external” authority of the church in favor of the “internal” dictates of conscience, and the Christian concept of the soul, whatever else it might have done, indelibly marked our conception of the world with this insistence on the “internal.” In modern philosophy, the same emphasis on intellectual autonomy defined the epoch-making philosophy of René Descartes, who insisted on the need for each person to decide, for oneself, what was true and what was false, on the basis of one’s own arguments and experience. It is a notion that virtually defines the Enlightenment, and, consequently, it is a notion that still defines our own way of thinking. But this seemingly innocent emphasis on consciousness takes a hazardous turn as soon as one begins to reflect on it: if everything we know depends on consciousness, then how can we ever know anything *outside* of consciousness? We can see how easily Descartes’s followers, including Leibniz and the sceptic David Hume, could argue that, in effect, we can know *only* our ideas and experience. And from this, it is an easy step to the dilemma: *either* we accept the intolerable suggestion that we really don’t know anything about the world outside of us, *or*, we somehow argue that our ideas and experience themselves *are constitutive of the world*. And so we become idealists. This is where idealist metaphysics begins, and we shall see that Fichte, simply taking for granted the established idealistic tradition from Leibniz to Kant, starts his entire philosophy with exactly this chain of reasoning.¹¹

German Idealism, then, consists of a series of ingenious attempts to work out a system which includes both our everyday experience and beliefs and this peculiar view that the world depends on our own ideas and experiences. There are obvious problems: what does this do to science, which seems to theorize not about our ideas but an

11. So too Schelling, who begins his *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus* (Tübingen; 1800) with the insistence that we choose between two—and only two—possible cases: either “the object may be taken as primary and then we ask how a subjective factor that agrees with it can be joined to it” or “the subjective factor may be taken as primary and the problem then is how an object that agrees with it can be joined to it.” It is important to begin by appreciating the fact that such questions were simply accepted at face value in Hegel’s time, well before the pointed criticisms of such figures as Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. But, of course, to appreciate this is not to fall into it.

objective world? What of religion, which speaks of matters essentially beyond our experience? And what of the practical concerns of life?—How do these fantastic revisions of our ways of seeing the world effect them? Beneath the obscure and sometimes hateful language of the German Idealists are some of the most inspiring—and dangerous—images in the history of Western thinking.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Kant is the Moses of our nation, who leads them out of their Egyptian inertia into the free and open desert of his speculations, and who brings down the rigorous law from the holy mountain. —Hölderlin, (1799)

Hegel considered Kant “the basis and point of departure of modern German philosophy”; in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he gave Kant a place equalled only by Plato and Aristotle.¹² Kant was the grand synthesis of the warring schools of thought that preceded him. More importantly, he is the Abraham of virtually every Western philosophical movement of the past two centuries—pragmatism, existentialism, logical positivism, process philosophy and phenomenology, transcendental idealism, and social realism. It would border on absurdity to treat him merely as an “influence” on German philosophy of the early 19th century; without Kant, there could have been no such philosophy.

There is no possibility of doing justice to Kant’s complex “architectonic” in a handful of pages, but it should be possible to sketch out his main concerns, his method of treating them, and his revolutionary conclusions. In a sentence: His main concern is the mutual defense and reconciliation of scientific knowledge and the “practical” values of morality and religion in a single “systematic” view of the universe. His method is Cartesian—borrowed from Descartes—and consists in the examination of one’s own experience with an eye to developing *internal* (“subjective”) criteria for truth and “objectivity.” His philosophy thus becomes the critical analysis of human consciousness and “reason,” to prove the necessity of our experience of the “external” world and the limitations of those laws which apply, respectively, to that world of nature and the very different world of human free-

12. In Vol. 3, pp. 423–78.

dom. It is a "critique" of reason in the sense of a demonstration of both the limits of reason and what it is rational to believe.¹³

Kant's main problem was not a technical philosophical puzzle, as it may appear to be on a first reading of his work; it was a deep personal problem which he shared with most of the "enlightened" figures of his times. Science and religion had been warring since the Renaissance, and each had claimed universal validity at the expense of the other. There had been a time when all scientific hypotheses were forced to defend their orthodoxy by appeal to Scripture, but those times had given way to the world of Newton and the Enlightenment, in which the doctrines of the church were now forced to justify themselves in the equally uncompromising court of scientific evidence. Kant was a devotee of Isaac Newton's physics, but he was also a devout Christian. How could he reconcile his religion with the mechanical Newtonian world of bodies in motion, in which a man was but a piece of the machine, and God, if he were part of the hypothesis at all, seemed relegated to the role of the great watch-winder, setting the great universe-machine in motion but then finding himself without further duties. In the world of practice, however, human responsibility found itself required to deny the determinacy of its actions and found belief in God incompatible with belief in the mechanical autonomy of the world. And so Kant's problem was clear—to reconcile these warring opposites and make it possible for a man like himself to be a whole-hearted Newtonian, a devout Christian, and a responsible citizen.¹⁴

The reconciliation of knowledge and practice was not Kant's only problem. Both realms had been recently under attack by the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, whom Kant credits with "awakening him from his dogmatic slumbers." Hume had argued mercilessly that the principles upon which the Newtonian picture of the universe and our everyday knowledge are founded are impossible to justify, either by appeal to rational insight or by appeal to experience. However indispensable such principles might be (including, among others, our belief that the world exists "outside" of us), justifiable they are not. Similarly, Hume argued that moral principles and religious doctrines are

13. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1958) hereafter cited *CPR*, with the letters A and B designating the original German text, first edition of 1781 and second edition of 1787 respectively. This quote, *CPR*, A xii.

14. Perhaps it is important to anticipate at this point the fact that this would *not* be the overview of Kant's ambitions that would be held by his immediate followers, especially Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Fichte and Hegel, in particular, were not nearly so enthralled with Newtonian science as Kant was, and they all saw his sharp division into warring opposites as the main problem of *his* philosophy rather than as a cosmic paradox Kant had inherited from his past.

also beyond the scope of rational or experiential justification. Our moral sense is mere “sentiment” and our religious beliefs mere superstition and fear. And so Kant found it necessary not only to reconcile the warring factions but to justify each of them as well.

This second problem led to yet a third. Many philosophers before him had attempted to justify the basic principles of knowledge and practice, and the discipline which sought to do this, *metaphysics*, “the queen of the sciences,” had been a battleground for centuries for philosophers of various persuasions without the gain of “even so much as an inch of territory” by any combatant. Why was it so difficult for metaphysicians to determine what the world is “really” like? Two thousand years of interminable wrangling could only mean that something was drastically wrong with the way these disputes had been carried out.¹⁵

And so—we may summarize Kant’s aims in philosophy, to defend and reconcile the metaphysical principles basic to scientific knowledge and the practical values of morality, religion, and—we should add—aesthetics. To do so he constructed, late in life, three monumental *Critiques*: the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 2nd ed. 1787), which attempted the defense of the metaphysical principles of science, mathematics, and knowledge in general; *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), which attempted the defense of the “practical” metaphysical ideals of morality and Christianity; the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which, in addition to tying the other two *Critiques* together, attempted to defend the universality of aesthetic judgments of taste and defend an all-encompassing organic picture of the universe, beyond the mechanical causality of science and more in line with the German “Spirit” of the times. These three impressive volumes were supported by various summary pamphlets and essays which elaborated upon specific aspects of the “critical” philosophy.¹⁶

“All knowledge,” Kant tells us, “begins with experience.” But, he adds, all knowledge does not, as the empiricists argued, arise *from* experience. That is, some of the principles of knowledge—its most basic concepts and judgments—are supplied *to* experience. They are

15. *CPR*, B xv.

16. I. Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt, 1795); *Kritik der Urtheils-Kraft* (Berlin, 1790). Again, by way of anticipation, it is important to stress the enormous differences between the way Kant saw his own work, with all three books of equal weight and merit, the way most modern American and English philosophers see his work—in terms of the first two *Critiques* only—and the way that Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel viewed his work—with ambivalent feelings about the first book, approval if not dogmatic acceptance of the second, and enthusiasm (not always well directed) regarding the third.

conditions that make our experience possible; they *precede* every particular experience and so, in Kant's terms, are *a priori*—literally, “before.” The standpoint is Cartesian, but the strategy is novel. Like Descartes, Kant insists on uncompromised intellectual *autonomy*, the demand that whatever is worth believing can be demonstrated by the individual thinker, exercising his or her own reason. The novel, even revolutionary, twist is this: the strategy of the demonstration will be to show that the basic principles of knowledge and morality—just those that had been doubted by sceptics—are universal and necessary principles because we ourselves *supply* them to our every experience, and *no other principles are possible*. The basic principles of our experience, therefore, are the “necessary conditions for any possible experience.”¹⁷

The strategy of the first *Critique*, therefore, might be simply summarized as; “What are the necessary conditions for me to have an experience and, subsequently, knowledge of that experience?” And he goes on to show that among these conditions are the existence of the world in space and time, outside of us, the existence of substantial objects that are not dependent upon our particular perceptions of them, the reality of cause and effect relations between various events that are not (as Hume had argued) mere habits of association or unjustified expectations on our part. And these conditions, in every case, are forms and concepts supplied by the human mind. Space and time, he tells us, are the “a priori forms of intuition,” while the substantiality of objects and cause and effect necessity are “a priori concepts of the understanding” or, in Kant's jargon, *categories*.¹⁸ (The term comes from Aristotle.)

From the point of view of the philosophers who immediately follow Kant—Hegel included—the strategy might be viewed as the attempt to “deduce” from a single first premise, that is, the Cartesian fact of the indubitability of one's own conscious existence, the necessary structures of human experience. The concept of “deduction” plays a major role in Kant as well as in his followers, but it is obvious to everyone that the “deductions” they attempt are not “deductions” in the modern sense (of a formal inference from one proposition to another, according to certain rules guaranteeing validity). A “deduc-

17. *CPR*, B 1–25.

18. Kant had 12 categories, which he borrowed from certain deservedly forgotten theories of psychology. Hegel rejected this “picking up categories were he found them” and, following Fichte and Schelling, insisted on a more “systematic” way of discovering them. Hegel uses the term cautiously and almost always with some reference to Kant's views (e.g. *Phenomenology*, 235).

tion" is rather a demonstration (not necessarily a "proof") of the necessary conditions of our experience, what *must* be the case to make sense of our experience.

In ethics, Kant's strategy is similar, to show from the fact that we have a sense of morality (as opposed to mere personal desires and "inclinations") that certain principles are *rational* because they are the necessary conditions for this moral sense, e.g. the universal validity of moral laws, and belief in God as the overseer of morality. But the key to this whole effort to "deduce" necessary principles is, from beginning to end, the demand for *rational autonomy*, the insistence that all rational principles must be in some sense "my own" as well as universal, provable by me (or us) to myself (ourselves), and in no case accepted merely on the basis of habit, sentiment, tradition, or authority.

Using this Cartesian strategy, Kant solves his first and most pressing problem—the reconciliation of knowledge and practice—by distinguishing two different activities of consciousness: "understanding," which gives shape to experience with its concepts, and "reason," which "legislates laws of freedom, to ourselves as agents." Sometimes Kant says that understanding and reason have "separate jurisdictions over the same territory," the first concerned with the laws of science, the second with the principles of right action. At other times he says that these two "faculties" in fact define "two different worlds." But in either case, they are no longer antagonists. Science is given universal domain throughout the realm of human knowledge. Morality and religion are given absolute domain throughout the world of human practice. This distinction carries with it the potentially objectionable demand that the principles of ethics and religion cannot be *known* at all. It also leaves us with a nagging suspicion that this radical separation will make even more difficult Kant's intention of reconciling the two realms in such a way that the world of knowledge and the world of action and faith are one and the same world. These two considerations will be the foci of the dissatisfactions of Kant's followers, notably, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. But before we dwell on the difficulties of Kant's philosophy, we have first to attend to the basic radical move, his "Copernican Revolution," which quite literally shifted the direction of philosophy from the nature of reality "out there" to the essential structures of human consciousness.

For two thousand years, since Protagoras and even Socrates, philosophers had been pursuing anthropocentricity in philosophy ("man is the measure of all things," "Know Thyself"). In modern times, this often arrogant anthropocentricity had manifested itself in the En-

lightenment, in the rebellion of Descartes and Luther against church authority, and in the daring attempt by Newton to comprehend the universe in terms of human understanding. But, for the same two thousand years, philosophers had timidly retreated from their goal, caught in the idea of the “outside” world, a world beyond our direct experience. For Plato, our human world was but a transient world of changes and “becoming,” a mere shadow of the “real” world of “being.” And for Descartes, all he could feel immediately certain about (at least prior to God’s assurances) were his own ideas. The correspondence of these ideas to the physical world was a matter of doubt. Similarly, John Locke saw our ideas as mere “representations” of the “outside world,” and it was not a difficult trick, beginning from this position, for Bishop Berkeley and David Hume to show that we could never know anything but our own ideas. In response to this tradition, Kant makes the decisive step (but not the complete step—that is left to Hegel) in the fulfillment of this long-standing human-centered ambition of philosophy. He radically reverses the priorities and shifts the burden of defense. Consciousness, not the world, becomes our fixed point of reference. Other philosophers had asked, “How can I know that my ideas correspond to the way the world *really* is?” Kant now asks, “What must the world be like in order for me to know it?” The change seems, at first glance, a mere sleight of hand, but as we pursue Kant’s answer, we see that it truly is a revolution of “Copernican” proportions. He says, we should no longer ask whether we can know what *the* world is like; we should now ask what the world *must* be like as we know it. Here is his answer to Hume’s sceptical challenge. The basic principles of metaphysics are not indefensible statements of fact about the world; they are rather descriptions of our consciousness of the world and the necessary structures which we impose on our experience. The “laws of nature” are nothing other than the *rules* according to which we *constitute* or *synthesize* our world out of our raw experience. “The understanding is itself the lawgiver of nature.”¹⁹

The idea that we constitute or synthesize our world according to rules (through our “productive imagination”) sounds very much as if we, each of us, actually *creates* a world to his own fancy. But this is not Kant’s intention, and he insists, first of all, that this activity involves a passive element as well, our sensibility, or intuitions, upon which we impose the concepts (or *categories*) of understanding. These intuitions also have a necessary form, namely, the form of space and time. Moreover, it is not as if our concepts or categories are a matter of

19. CPR, A 126.

choice for us. The bulk of Kant's first *Critique* is dedicated to the demonstration that the set of categories which we use to understand our world is the *only* set of categories which *any* consciousness could use to experience and understand the world. Kant calls this demonstration a "transcendental argument" or "deduction," and its purpose is to show that the categories of our understanding are both necessary and sufficient for *any possible experience*. Similarly, our experience of the world "outside" of us in space and time is necessary for any possible experience. These arguments are designed specifically as an answer to Hume, for if the principles in question are the only possible principles of knowledge, then that surely constitutes a rational proof of their universal validity.

This Copernican Revolution also answers Kant's third concern, to understand and to end the seemingly endless bickering among philosophers. So long as metaphysicians thought that they were suggesting ultimate structures of the world outside of our experience, no wonder there was, in Kant's terms, "no standard weight to distinguish sound knowledge from shallow talk."²⁰ But if, as Kant argues, metaphysical principles are in fact descriptions of the necessary rules or structures of any understanding of the world, then the resolution of metaphysics is at hand. Either a metaphysical principle can be demonstrated, through a transcendental argument or deduction, to be a necessary principle of experience, or it cannot. And if it cannot, it may be, as Hume had argued, "committed to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (*Enquiry*, p. 173). Unless, of course, it has some other role to play in human life—a *practical* role—in which case it becomes a matter of *reason*, not understanding.²¹

In the last part of his first *Critique*, Kant introduces the notion of *dialectic*, by which he means the hopeless attempt to comprehend the infinite, to know the ultimate structures of the universe (including God) and the ultimate nature of the self or soul. Kant has distinguished between understanding, which applies its concepts only to the data of experience and thus can know only particular objects and finite sets of objects, and *reason*, which applies these same concepts *beyond* the data of experience to the universe as a whole, to the self as a metaphysical entity, and to God. The question then becomes: Can

20. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. L.W. Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p. 4.

21. In a note in *CPR* (B 395n.), Kant comments that "Metaphysics has for the real object of its investigation three ideas only; God, freedom, and immortality; . . . Everything else treated by that science is a means only to establish those ideas and their reality." But all three ideas, as Kant goes on to show, are matters of *practical reason*, not possible objects of knowledge or understanding.

we *know* of such things through reason alone, “pure reason?”—and Kant’s answer is “no.” It is worth noting that Hegel acknowledges Kant’s “Transcendental Dialectic” as his greatest contribution to philosophy, both for its basic distinction between understanding and reason and for its insights into the nature of our attempt to apply our concepts to the infinite. What Kant discovers is that these concepts, when so applied, yield *contradictory yet valid* results, that is, pairs of *antinomies*, each of which is supported by a perfectly sound and valid argument.²² Kant argues that such absurd results can only prove that metaphysicians must give up the attempt to understand the infinite. Hegel will arrive at a very different conclusion. Praising Kant’s discovery of the antinomies, he will complain that Kant only located four such pairs, when in fact there are indefinitely many more. What Kant discovered, according to Hegel, is the dialectic of reason, which can, at one and the same time, entertain opposing and even contradictory attitudes toward the world. This is not the place to explain and defend this much-abused Hegelian thesis.²³ But it is important to remember that this notion of “contradiction,” the dialectic, and the infamous triad of “thesis-antithesis-synthesis” come straight out of Kant’s first *Critique*.

With Kant’s Copernican Revolution, questions about the ultimate structure of the world become questions about the ultimate structure of our minds. But understanding nature is but one human enterprise among others; and the concepts of the understanding only provide us with one kind of principle. There are also principles based on the concepts of reason which have their own kind of validity, not as knowledge but in terms of *practice*. This is the basis of Kant’s radical separation of the world of knowledge and science and the practical world of God and morality and human action. The first world, the “sensible world” of scientific knowledge and Newtonian mechanics, is viewed from the standpoint of the understanding, including the categories of substance and universal causality, applied to the data of experience within the forms of space and time. The second world, the “intelligible world” of morality, freedom, and good intentions, God

22. Kant’s four pairs of antinomies:

- I. Thesis: the world has a beginning in space and time.
Antithesis: the world does not have a beginning in space and time.
- II. Thesis: everything consists of simple elements.
Antithesis: there are no simple elements.
- III. Thesis: there are causes through freedom.
Antithesis: there are no causes through freedom, only natural causes.
- IV. Thesis: there is a necessary being.
Antithesis: there is no necessary being.

23. See Chapter 4b, pp. 203ff.

and the immortality of the soul, is viewed from the standpoint of man as moral agent, willing his good deeds on the basis of universally rational principles of *duty*. Within the sensible world of sensory experience and knowledge, the categories of the understanding and the forms of space and time reign supreme and unchallenged; within the intelligible world of God and morality, the presumption of human freedom and responsibility and the inviolability of religious faith lie beyond the reaches of scientific determinism and demands for concrete evidence. Each of us lives in two worlds, and, in a sense, each has two selves—a self in each world, a knowing (or “transcendental”) self which applies the categories of understanding to experience, and a willing, rational self which acts in freedom and stands outside the forms of time and space before God. In both worlds, it is the ideal of rational *autonomy* that reigns supreme, but it is this dualism of worlds and selves that will drive the Kantian revolution to ever greater extremes, much as it was the contradictions in the French Enlightenment that drove the French Revolution to ever more desperate attempts to consolidate itself. Kant himself attempts such a synthesis in his third *Critique*, but he remains, by his own admission, a dualist. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel will be unyielding Copernican revolutionaries, but they are not willing to remain Kantian dualists. It is this ongoing drive for a “synthesis of theory and practice” that will carry the revolution to its intellectual heights of 1806, in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.

Kant’s schizoid two-standpoint, two-world, two-self view would be trouble enough; but he compounded confusion by falling short in what was undoubtedly the boldest move of his philosophy. Just as so many philosophers before him had stated their anthropocentric intentions but then fallen back on the ominous idea of an “outside world,” a world beyond our experience, so Kant too felt obliged, with considerable hesitation at first, to reintroduce the idea of a world-in-itself, beyond experience, in juxtaposition to the world of our experience and understanding. Later philosophers, notably Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, would attempt to minimize this “fatal mistake” in Kant’s philosophizing. There can be no doubt, however, that this distinction between the world of our experience—or the *phenomenal* world or world as *phenomenon*—and the world as it is “in-itself”—the *noumenal* world or world as *noumenon*—was absolutely essential to Kant’s own thinking. For it was this distinction between the world of our experience and the world-in-itself that provided Kant with the basis for distinguishing his sensible and intelligible worlds. It is the idea of a world “in itself” that provides us with the passive element in our experience,

the intuitions of sense which are *given* to us by the world itself. It is the world-in-itself—beyond the categories of our understanding and the necessary form of time—that explains how it can be that our selves—that is, our noumenal selves—can be immortal and beyond the clutches of time. Similarly, it allows God to be outside the realm of Newtonian physics and outside of space and time, yet reserves for him the essential roles of divine judge and ultimate moral sanction. Moreover, it is this distinction which will ultimately allow Kant to defend a non-Newtonian concept of the universe, as itself a striving and struggling Being, not as a matter of scientific explanation but nonetheless a matter of rational belief.

These benefits are not without their cost, however. The addition of the world-in-itself has the effect, as Fichte and others are quick to demonstrate, of subverting the whole point of Kant's revolution. Moreover, the idea that our moral selves belong to the world-in-itself and not to the world of experience has the awkward consequence that our everyday moral actions and good deeds are performed outside of the physical world in which they have their effects. This is peculiar indeed, and its only resolution, attempted clumsily by Fichte, then by Hegel, is the elimination of the world beyond experience and all that goes along with it. Knowledge and practice must be part of one and the same "system."

In the realm of practice, Kant's strategy parallels that of the first *Critique*. The *Critique of Practical Reason* begins with the subjective fact of moral experience, and then attempts to show, by use of transcendental type arguments, that the principles of our moral life are universally valid and necessary for *any rational creature*.²⁴ This last phrase marks another great revolutionary step in Kant's philosophy, for one of these rational creatures (who is thus subject to the moral law) is God. This is a dramatic shift in priority from traditional arguments that base morality upon the word of God. For Kant, God's existence will be established on the basis of the moral law rather than the moral law defended by appeal to God's existence. Morality is the basis of the whole of practical reason, religion too. Kant's argument is that morality consists of purely formal principles in the form of "*categorical imperatives*," commands to act which are unqualified and which make no allowances for personal preferences and individual circumstances.²⁵ Thus Kant makes a sharp distinction (once again with Hume

24. For instance, in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*FMM*), trans. L.W. Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), esp. p. 96ff.

25. Most famously, "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law," *FMM*, p. 52. Also, *Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR*), trans. L.W. Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p. 30.

in mind) between *duty*, action on rational principle, and all motives of personal *inclination*, prudence, and sentiment—anything other than the pure desire to do one's duty. Moral laws, therefore, are categorical imperatives which abstract from individuals and provide a formal morality for all rational creatures. The unconditioned universality of moral laws once again allows Kant to realize the ultimate ideal of his philosophy, rational autonomy; by insisting that morality is a matter of reason alone he denies the necessity of an individual appealing to particular circumstances, or local customs, or contingencies of which he or she may not be aware. But the application of such principles in particular cases therefore remains an open question, and here Fichte and then Hegel raise the objection that Kant has failed to consider what is most essential to the moral life—the *particularities* of human moral claims. But for Kant, our moral sense, as wholly autonomous and independent of external contingencies, is the premise of practical philosophy, just as self-evident as the fact of one's own existence in the first *Critique*. And with this, Fichte in particular could not agree more enthusiastically.²⁶

Having once established his abstract conception of morality, Kant proceeds to prove that a necessary presupposition or "postulate" of moral accountability is human freedom, and so freedom takes its treasured spot in the intelligible world ("the world of Freedom"), parallel to the Newtonian principle of universal causality in the sensible world. Moreover, Kant attempts to show that this conception of morality, with its weighty reliance on duty, also presupposes the postulates of God and the immortality of the soul. Duty must be rewarded, and as it is evident that it is too rarely rewarded in this life, it is necessary to believe that it will be rewarded, and rewarded justly, in a future life. And this in turn requires a belief in the survival of the soul after death and the existence of a divine, omniscient, and benign Judge who will arrange for this fairest of all possible arrangements (which Kant calls, after a long Scholastic tradition, the *Summum Bonum*).²⁷ It is at this point that the conception of an intelligible world outside of time is cashed in to defend Kant's faith in Christianity.²⁸

26. For example, "there is within me an impulse to absolute, independent self-activity," in Fichte's *Vocation of Man*, trans. William Smith (Chicago: Open Court, 1931), p. 95.

27. Kant defines the "Summum Bonum" as the rational ideal in which virtue is commensurable with happiness:

In the Summum Bonum which is practical for us, i.e. one which is to be made real by our will, virtue and happiness are thought of as necessarily combined, so that the one cannot be assumed by a practical reason without the other belonging to it (*CPrR*, p. 113).

28. "The doctrine of Christianity, even when not regarded as a religious doctrine, gives at this point a concept of the Summum Bonum (the Kingdom of God) which is alone sufficient to the strictest demand of practical reason" (*CPrR*, 127–28).

Needless to say, there are multitudes of problems here, but the project itself, the defense of Christianity as a *rational* religion whose function it is to support morality, is one that will greatly influence the young Hegel. In fact, it is this aspect of Kant's philosophy (which Kant had just argued separately in an essay, "Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone" (1793)) which was one of the most definitive influences in Hegel's first writings.²⁹

Kant's third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment*, was his attempt to synthesize the two-worlds view, but it was also a bold attempt, which would have tremendous influence on more "romantic" philosophers to follow, to defend a most imaginative and exciting picture of the "super-sensible world," the world-in-itself, as *teleological*, as having a purpose (what Kant calls "finality") and struggling to actualize the new world preached so incessantly by the Enlightenment. Kant's starting point, very much in tune with the Enlightenment, is the sense of wonder and aesthetic appreciation at the intelligibility of nature, the marvelous simplicity of its laws and the way, *à la* Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds," nature has so much "wisdom, economy, forethought and beneficence." Kant's image, however, is very much a Romantic image, and the universe he there describes looks far more like the cosmos of the poets than the nuts-and-bolts mechanism of Newtonian mechanics. But however invaluable this "regulative" principle of reason, inspiring us to seek ever further into the workings of nature, the ultimate intelligibility and purposiveness of the world can never be a matter of *knowledge*. It is, at best, a rational hope, perhaps even an unavoidable expectation. But the idea of a purposive universe, a belief which Kant also introduces into his ethics ("if nature intended for us only to be happy, she would not have endowed us with reason"), fits into the sensibility of Goethe and the romantic poets as well as the Enlightenment sense of an orderly universe. (Goethe often said that it was only Kant's third *Critique* that he liked—or could even read.) The idea of a universe with its own internal principles of development ("intrinsic finality") was wholly at one with Goethe's own Aristotelean-biological conception of the cosmos, and the German Idealists following Kant will take this image as the centerpiece of their entire philosophy, Hegel in particular. Furthermore, because Kant says that aesthetic judgment is a synthesis of understanding and reason, art takes on a new philosophical importance for the idealists—much in tune with the new German spirit of poetry. God Himself as the ultimate artist becomes a central theme of the more romantic-

29. See Chapter 3.

mindful idealists—Schelling in particular. It is even Kant, before the Romantic poets, who declares the unique role of the artistic genius as “beyond all rules,” giving rise to some of the most obnoxious features of German Romanticism.³⁰

Compared with the first two *Critiques*, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* has usually been judged a very poor third, with none of the single-minded coherence and argumentation of his theories of knowledge, morality, and religion. But to the German Idealists who follow him most immediately, the themes of the third *Critique* are as influential as the other two. The “regulative” picture of a teleological universe, in particular, together with Goethe's powerful image of *Bildung* and the cosmic pretensions of the Romantic poets, would become the dominant image of the new century, not Kant's “criticism,” which belonged to an earlier age that could still believe in “enlightenment” pure and simple.³¹

German Idealism after Kant

The Kantian philosophy needed to have its spirit distinguished from its letter, and to have its purely speculative principle lifted out of the remainder that belonged to, or could be used for, the arguments of reflection. In the principle of the deduction of the categories Kant's philosophy is authentic idealism; and it is this principle that Fichte extracted in a purer, stricter form and called the spirit of Kantian philosophy. —Hegel (1801)

From the moment of publication of the first edition of Kant's first *Critique*, Kantianism ruled academic philosophy. It also had enormous influences outside of philosophy, in poetry, literature in general, both literary and social criticism, psychology, anthropology, physics, and cosmology and—most important of all for the education of young Hegel—in religion. The Kantian view of Christianity as a set of “postulates of practical reason” dominated the Lutheran theology Hegel learned at the Tübingen *Stift*. (We shall talk about this in the next chapter.) Here, I want to trace the philosophical development from Kant to Hegel through a single sequence of thinkers, from Kant to Fichte and then to Schelling, who was one of Hegel's best friends in college (that is, the *Stift*) and the brilliant speculative idealist who was

30. It was this rule-breaking arrogance that prompted Goethe to declare the whole movement “sickly.” In Paris, Romanticism became a straightforward expression of arrogance; Theophile Gautier became known as the best of those romantic “Bohemians” whose main purpose in life was “to exasperate the Philistines!”

31. “‘Enlightenment.’ By this simple means it will clear up the confusion of this world” (*Phenomenology*, 540).

responsible for Hegel's first professional opportunities. But first, I think it is important to undermine the impression, so easy to get from the Kant-Fichte-Schelling-Hegel sequence, that German Idealism after Kant moved in a single direction, an impression, needless to say, that Hegel himself fondly fostered in his later lectures on the history of modern philosophy.³²

Fichte's reinterpretation of Kant, which we shall discuss in some detail, begins with the rejection of the "thing-in-itself" and a shift of the whole Kantian enterprise into the concerns of the second *Critique*, that is, taking freedom and rational autonomy as primary, questions about knowledge and the nature of the world as secondary, and Newton's physics, which was extremely important to Kant, as not important at all. Fichte wholly rejected the view that we are, first of all, observers of the world; we are always moral agents, and everything about the world must be "deduced" from that starting point—from our moral sense rather than from the facts of experience as such.³³ Indeed, the most striking feature of Fichte's idealism is his uncompromising rejection of all things passive in experience, the idea that there is a world outside of us, the idea that there is a manifold of intuition or set of sensations that we do not produce, the idea that the self, in any sense, is bound by rules and structures not of its own choosing.³⁴

Schelling adopts Fichte's ego-centered interpretation of Kant, but he adds to it the insistence that one could not simply exorcise Kant's vital concern in the first *Critique*, ignore Newton and science and nature and relegate the whole of human experience to a "postulate of practical reason." So Schelling takes up the subject of nature and develops a "philosophy of nature," the point of which is to put Newton in his place (as the "lowest level" of nature interpretation) and defend instead an image of nature as a whole as a living, developing being, following the same course of self-realization as consciousness—in fact, identical with it, as a parallel aspect of one all-encompassing "world soul." This was, of course, the image of Kant's third *Critique*, interpreted by Schelling (as it was not by Kant) as the main point of the entire Kantian enterprise.³⁵

But at every point in its development, the idealist movement from Kant to Fichte to Schelling was opposed by an equally powerful "realist" interpretation of Kant and at odds as well with an extravagant "romantic" interpretation which, although it frequently borrowed from

32. *Lectures*, Vol. 3, pp. 409–554.

33. "... not idle contemplation of thyself, not brooding over sensations, but action, and action alone, determines your worth" (*Vocation of Man*, p. 94).

34. "I am my own creation" (*Vocation of Man*, p. 103).

35. For example, in his "World Soul as a Hypothesis for Physics" in 1796.

Fichte and Schelling, found these philosophers far too “rational” to share their enthusiasm for sheer feeling and inspiration, devoid of any attempt to formulate a philosophical system. Indeed, the idea of a philosophical “system” was itself a major point of controversy, and the call to “systematize Kant,” which was the shared aim of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, was first formulated by one of their arch-rivals, the “rational realist” Reinhold.³⁶

Karl Leonard Reinhold (1758–1823) proved himself to be one of the most loyal Kant-interpreters. He rejected what he considered to be the one-sided and ego-maniacal emphasis on “self” that he saw in the idealist interpretation of Kant, and he insisted on taking Kant at his word, to be providing the necessary conditions of experience. He did not reject the thing-in-itself, although he insisted that it could not be known in any sense. But he also insisted that the self, which provided the first premise for the idealist interpretation, could not be known either. He also joined with Kant, and against the idealists, in recognizing the passivity of intuitions, which he considered the “given” element in experience and its material content.

A similar, commonsensical view was the more psychological interpretation of Kant by Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843). He called his view an “anthropological” interpretation and rejected what the idealists took to be utterly essential to their program, namely, the possibility of showing that the *a priori* or necessary conditions of experience could in some sense be demonstrated to be “absolute.” At most, one could show that certain principles were to be found in every finite mind. The idea of a “transcendental deduction,” therefore, culminating in the Absolute and demonstrating the unconditional validity of any particular view of the world, would be impossible.³⁷

The philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), on the other hand, viewed Kant’s enterprise as a demonstration of the *limits* of reason. Reason and understanding cannot grasp the true nature of the world, Jacobi argued, using Kant’s own arguments against him. He accepted Kant’s over-all picture of the universe in the third *Critique*, but disagreed that this picture could never be *known* to be true. But such knowledge, he argued, could never come through *thought*

36. Some of Hegel’s first published works were attacks on Reinhold, including his *Differenz*-essay of 1801. Schelling was reported to have attacked him too, in less professional terms, and his correspondence is filled with references to Reinhold’s “stupidities” and “monkish foxiness.” Indeed, the proper scholarly study of German Idealism might well be augmented with a sociopathological study of this somewhat spectacular battle of egos, which we shall not enter into here. I shall only introduce, in perfectly respectable terms, a few of the combatants.

37. Fries is still largely untranslated; a brief introduction to his philosophy is A. Mourelatos, “Fries,” in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards, (New York: Free Press, 1966).

but only through simple feeling or belief ("*Glaube*"). Thus he too rejects the ambitious program of Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling, to "systematize Kant," for Kant cannot be systematized. Knowledge of "the Absolute" is not a matter of reason, not a function of conceptualization, not a question of articulation.³⁸

A similarly anti-rationalist view of knowledge of the world-in-itself, or "the Absolute," was defended for years by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who would later be Hegel's colleague at the University of Berlin.³⁹ Schleiermacher too held that knowledge of "the Absolute," in this case God, was a matter of pure "feeling," and he rejected Kant's attempts to "rationalize" religion. (Accordingly, he would become Hegel's antagonist as well.) Opposed to the rationalists too were the Romantic poets, led by August and Friedrich Schlegel (1767–1845 and 1772–1829) and their friend Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772–1801).⁴⁰ They too accepted the final teleological vision of Kant's third *Critique* but rejected the ideal of rational autonomy that permeated the first two *Critiques*. And in the complex and often cacophonous interaction between these Romantics and anti-rationalists and the rational realists, the various idealists and the ever-present authority of Kant's own works, a philosophical version of Hobbes's "war of all against all" took over the German universities, as one professor (or aspirant) after another tried his own hand at recasting the Kantian philosophy into the definitive "system." And it is in this morass of ambitions, hostilities, and mixed interpretations that the seemingly simple progression, from Kant to Fichte to Schelling to Hegel, has to be viewed.⁴¹

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814)

Fichte's philosophy has caused so much of a stir and has made an epoch to the extent that even those who declare themselves against it and strain themselves to get speculative systems of their own on the road, still cling to its principle, . . . and are incapable of resisting it. —Hegel (1801)

Reinhold made the first attempt to "systematize" Kant's philosophy, and won Kant's own approval and consequently the chair in philoso-

38. Jacobi is discussed in some detail, if not always fairly, in Hegel's essay, "Faith and Knowledge" (trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1977).

39. See R. Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher* (New York: Harper, 1941).

40. See, for example, M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*.

41. I have omitted mention of one of the best-known post-Kantians, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860); his *World as Will and Idea* was not published until 1819, and so he was not yet a contender for the Kantian crown. Indeed, he did not begin to achieve any significant notoriety until the latter half of the century.

phy at the University of Jena for doing so. Reinhold's successor, however, was a new brand of Kantian, not of an academic temperament at all, but a young radical, fired up by the French Revolution, Rousseau, and Romanticism more than the academic intrigues of the "critical philosophy." Johann Fichte shared none of Kant's enthusiasm for Newton and physics; he was wholly caught up in the practical concerns of the second *Critique*. For him, the Kantian philosophy became a search for a way of life. Kantian criticism became the search for a "vocation of man," and the cold and critical arguments of Kant's transcendental deductions became a *moral calling* for a newly arising and rebellious German nation.⁴²

In 1791 Fichte made the long journey to East Prussia in order to visit Kant, and a year later he published a very Kantian book, *Critique of All Revelation*,⁴³ which so impressed the Great Philosopher and many others (who at first thought the book itself was by Kant) that he obtained the chair in philosophy at the University of Jena, in 1794. During this period, however, he also joined the Jacobin club; he had a reputation as a Spinoza enthusiast—much impressed by pantheism even if Spinoza's determinism was antithetical to his activist temperament—and he became a popular, even notorious, teacher of a neo-Kantian ethic in which God emerged as not much more than the human moral order, taking Kant's reduction of religion to practical reason to its extreme, if not logical, conclusion. In 1799 he was fired from the University on a charge of atheism, no doubt because of his other radical activities as well. (Hegel, who was just about to begin his own university teaching career in Jena, must have taken careful note of the circumstances.)⁴⁴

The technical purpose of Fichte's philosophy was to "systematize" Kant, as Reinhold had insisted, which meant to take the confusion of categories and principles of the *Critiques*, including the uncomfortable split between "Nature and Freedom," understanding and practical reason, and place them all in a single logical order, with an explicit first premise and "deduction" of all further principles. To do this would be to "elevate the critical philosophy to *Science*," where "science" (*Wis-*

42. "If my entire knowledge revealed to me nothing but knowledge, I would be defrauded of my whole life. . . . Consciousness connects with reality in action, capable of producing something beyond myself" (*Vocation of Man*, pp. 93, 96). In 1800 the moral calling was "to unite our race into a single body" (p. 120), the ambition of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as well. In 1807–8, in his *Addresses [Reden] to the German Nation*, the call was nationalism, and Fichte is rightly identified with its beginning.

43. Fichte, *Versucheiner Kritik aller Offenbarung* (Königsberg, 1792), translated as *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* by Ganett Green (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978).

44. In the *Differenz*-essay, Hegel alludes to common sense which "detests and persecutes speculation" (p. 100); see Harris's note, 100n.

senschaft) would *not* be what we call “science” (i.e. a particular empirical method common to physics, chemistry, biology, and the social sciences), but the academic password of the period that meant, in effect, the most rigorous, thoughtful, and comprehensive treatment of the whole of human experience. Now in the beginning of this chapter, we pointed out that the purpose of a philosophical system, in general, was to provide an all-embracing account of Reality, or, in German Idealism, human consciousness in general. But Kant had failed to do this, Fichte and others complained, both because of the obscurity of the arguments of the first *Critique* and because of the intolerable separation of knowledge and freedom, the world of experience and the world-in-itself. The third *Critique*, however admirable, had not succeeded in bringing this system together, and so Fichte declared his purpose to be to “complete” Kant’s efforts in a “system,” taking his cue from the words of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

... the critical way alone is open, that this present century may succeed where all others failed, namely to give human reason complete satisfaction about that which has always engaged its curiosity, but so far in vain. (B, 884)

The “complete satisfaction” was a total system of reality, now viewed through the idealist lenses of the German philosophers, and the century was almost at its end. Thus Fichte announced his ambition to the world, to do what Kant had only begun, to re-present the whole of the Kantian philosophy in a single logical system rather than two or three, and rigorously to “deduce” all the principles of knowledge and practice from a single premise. This, he claimed, was the “spirit” of Kant’s philosophy even if it wasn’t exactly its letter, and in 1794 he launched the first edition of his *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁴⁵ Kant’s own reception of the work was less than enthusiastic. In fact, the Fichtean pretense of “completing” the critical philosophy became so widely accepted that, in 1799, Kant felt compelled to disclaim any affiliation with Fichte in a conspicuously nasty public notice:

I must remark here that the assumption that I have intended to publish only a *propædæutic* to transcendental philosophy and not the actual system of this philosophy is incomprehensible to me. Such an intention could never have occurred to me, since I took the completeness of pure philosophy within the *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* to be the best indication of the truth of my work.

There is an Italian proverb: May God protect us from our friends, and we shall watch out for our enemies ourselves. There are friends

45. (Frankfurt, 1966). Translated as *Science of Knowledge* by Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970). “I have long asserted, and I repeat

who mean well by us but who are doltish in choosing the means for promoting our ends. But there are also treacherous friends, deceitful, bent on our destruction while speaking the language of good will (*aliud lingua promptum, aliud pectore inclusum genere*, "who think one thing and say another"), and one cannot be too cautious about such men and the snares they have set. Nevertheless the critical philosophy must remain confident of its irresistible propensity to satisfy the theoretical as well as the moral, practical purposes of reason, confident that no change of opinions, no touching up or reconstruction into some other form, is in store for it; the system of the *Critique* rests on a fully secured foundation, established forever; it will be indispensable too for the noblest ends of mankind in all future ages.⁴⁶

But if Fichte's technical ambition of "completing" Kant's work bewilders us—as it obviously annoyed Kant, then we surely can understand the motives that drove that technical ambition, in particular, Kant's uncomfortable division of the world—the self and human life, into two mutually exclusive realms. Beneath the technical ambition is a driving concern for *morality*, and Fichte's real ambition, however obscure its professional trappings, was to salvage the primary status of human morality, and "life itself," from the imposing mechanical images of Newtonian science and Kant's first *Critique*. He was, above all else, a moralist, and even his most technical writings reek of a kind of vindictive moralism that emphasizes moral culpability even in one's choice of a metaphysics. The Kant that Fichte most appreciates is not the Kant whose themes he employs from the first *Critique*, but Kant the moralist of the second. The real premise of Fichte's over-all philosophy is nothing so technical as Kant's formidably named "transcendental unity of consciousness"; it is rather that restless sense of an infinite striving self, the same sense that was also finding representation in Goethe's *Faust*. (Goethe was a great admirer of Fichte at this time.)⁴⁷

Fichte was far less interested in knowledge and science than he was in ethical struggle—a matter of personality, perhaps, but also, a matter of the violent times, right at the height of the French Revolution. This fundamental moral sense of struggle became obvious even in the technicalities of his revision of Kant. He was indifferent to the validity of Newton's physics. If physical determinism is incompatible with freedom, then so much the worse for science. Turning against Spinoza, Fichte rejects determinism in all its forms and makes the freedom-loving, aspiring self the centerpiece of his philosophy, even

once more, that my system is nothing other than the *Kantian*. . . . I have said this not to hide behind a great authority . . . but to speak the truth and be just" (p. 4). Hereafter cited as "*Wiss.*"

46. From A. Zweig, *Kant's Philosophical Correspondence*, 1799.

47. "In the beginning, was the Act," parodies Goethe (cf. *Wiss.* p. 40).

the Absolute.⁴⁸ The whole of nature, as well as God, thus reduces to “postulates of practical reason,” mere supports for the moral self. Nature is a moral stage, on which all its men and women are moral players. Fichte’s definitive work, his *Wissenschaftslehre*, (the only one taken seriously by Hegel), made fully explicit his debt to Kant, and his ambition “to raise the Kantian philosophy to a science.”

On a narrow reading, the problem that defines the *Wissenschaftslehre* is misleadingly well-defined: Given (in line with the Kantian philosophy) that “a finite rational being has nothing beyond experience”⁴⁹, then what Kant considered the *passive* element in human experience—the fact that intuitions are given to us and we cannot simply choose what we perceive—can be accounted for in only one or two ways. *Either* one accepts the (odious) Kantian thesis that there are indeed “things in themselves” determining our intuitions from beyond our experience, by the nature of the case unknown to us, *or*, one rejects the idea of things-in-themselves, more in line with the Kantian Copernican Revolution, and insists that there is nothing beyond our experience, that therefore our intuitions too, as well as the forms of experience, are “posited” (from *setzen*) by the self as a product of the “productive imagination.” The first solution Fichte calls *dogmatism*, the second, *idealism*, making it quite obvious which he prefers, and which we *ought*, as moral beings, to prefer.⁵⁰ The first position raises an insurmountable problem, by Kant’s own standards; if causality is a category that we apply *within* our experience, then there is no sense to be given to the idea that our experience itself is caused by something outside of it. If objects are the objects of our experience, then there is no sense to be made of the idea of objects “in themselves,” beyond our experience. And if some of our experiences, namely, sensations (or intuitions), seem to be passive and caused in us by objects outside of us, then the conclusion must be that these are not really passive after all, despite initial impressions, but rather part of our own free activity in the “positing” of our moral world.⁵¹

But even if there were no way for the idealist to refute the dog-

48. This, in fact, was a general move among the German Spinoza-enthusiasts, including Jacobi and Schelling too. Fichte: “Every consistent dogmatist [realist] is necessarily a fatalist; . . . he denies the independence of the self . . . he is also a materialist. He could be refuted only on the basis of the postulation of freedom of the self . . .” (p. 13). Hegel clumsily marks the distinction in the Preface of the *Phenomenology* by (misleadingly) taking Spinoza’s notion of “Substance” to be purely physical and insisting that Spirit is not merely (but it is partly) Substance. (I have used “self” and “ego” interchangeably in the following discussion. Fichte and Schelling (Kant and Hegel too) often use “Ich” [I].)

49. *Wiss.*, p. 8.

50. *Ibid.* 9–12.

51. *Ibid.* esp. 60f. Also *Vocation of Man*, the whole of Book II (“Knowledge”), pp. 36–92.

matist (nor the dogmatist the idealist), Fichte makes it extremely clear that at least one consequence of dogmatism, the belief in universal causality and therefore the absence of human freedom (in Spinoza, for example, or in Kant's first *Critique*) is a morally reprehensible position, an abnegation of responsibility. It is here that Fichte makes his famous pronouncement:

what sort of philosophy one chooses depends, therefore, on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we can reject or accept as we wish; it is rather a thing animated by the soul of the person who holds it.⁵²

And leaving no doubt about the superiority of the idealist position, he adds,

A person indolent by nature or dulled and distorted by mental servitude, learned luxury, and vanity will never raise himself to the level of idealism. . . . And of the dogmatist, we can bewilder and harass him from all sides; but we cannot convince him, because he is incapable of calmly receiving and coolly assessing a theory he absolutely cannot endure.⁵³

Thus the technical question of accounting for the seeming "necessity" of the contents of our experience is a strategy, so evident in Fichte's language, of promoting the moral point of view, the sense of ourselves as essentially free, striving for moral perfection. His answer to Kant and his systematization of Kant's philosophy then turns out to be, in effect, a reduction of the first *Critique* to the second, a reduction of nature to a postulate of practical reason. Nature, Fichte argues, is posited by us in order to act out our moral will. The two egos of Kant are reduced to one—the acting ego of the second *Critique*, and the God who assures the moral order in Kant becomes in Fichte nothing more than that moral order itself, to be realized by the joint efforts of humanity. Later in his career, Fichte introduced baldly Christian images into his philosophy, the doctrine of Trinity and so forth, in order to re-establish himself as a Christian, i.e. respectable philosopher, after the Jena firing. But Christian language is almost wholly inconsistent with the rest of his philosophy—as Schelling objected—obviously imposed superficially on top of what is still largely an atheistic, or in any case pantheistic, moral view, which substitutes secular morality for faith in any religious sense.⁵⁴

52. Ibid. 16.

53. Ibid.

54. "We have spoken of faith as duty, which is faith in Him, His Reason, His Truth. . . . we believe in . . . an eternal life in which our freedom and morality may still continue their development" (!) (*Vocation of Man*, p. 157). "According to Stoic ethics, we are not to become like God, we actually are God. The *Wiss.* makes a careful distinction between

Fichte's strategy is to recast Kant in systematic form by examining more critically than his mentor the premise upon which the whole theory is built, namely, the Cartesian premise of one's own existence, what Kant calls "the transcendental unity of consciousness" and Fichte "the positing of the ego." Neither Kant nor Descartes, Fichte argues, had an adequate conception of this ego, or consciousness, and so their philosophies failed to make good their own greatest discovery, namely, the ego as the source of everything. Now Descartes had realized that the ego discovered in philosophical reflection could not be simply a person—that is, a physical being, wearing a turtleneck and blue blazer, a small mole on the right cheek; the ego so self-evidently necessary would have to be a thinking ego, a thinking thing, whose only necessary properties were those required for thought itself. But there was no doubt that Descartes continued to think of the "I" of his *Meditations* as a *personal* "I," an individual "I," distinct from other "I"s and from the things of the physical world. Kant rejected Descartes's conception of the "I" as a thing and insisted that it was but an *activity*, namely, the activity of applying the concepts of the understanding to intuitions in order to constitute objects. But with Kant, another significant shift prepares the way for Fichte's most extravagant philosophical move—the single most important philosophical move for an understanding of Hegel's philosophy too. Kant insists that the transcendental ego which applies the categories of the understanding is *not* to be thought of as a personal ego, that is, a personality which is unique to each individual, but rather, a "consciousness in general," necessarily common (as he proved in his first *Critique*) to all human beings. Kant still left it implicitly evident that the ego was individual—that is, that each person "had" his or her own transcendental ego, but Kant's own arguments prepared a case for the thesis that even this remnant of common sense was not justifiable. Once one tried to describe the identity of the ego that appeared to be so self-evident in Descartes's "I think, therefore I am," no such distinctions between individuals were possible. Thus Fichte concludes, on the basis of a defensible chain of reasoning from Descartes's and Kant's own starting point, that there is but a single boundless ego, an absolute Ego, which is immanent in all of us. The absolute Ego requires particular egos for its manifestation, but it is not limited to any particular ego or group of egos. It is nothing less than the whole of human consciousness—literally, "consciousness in general."

absolute being and real existence, and employs the former as a basis to explain the latter. . . . The *Wiss.* is not atheistic either, as Stoicism must be, if it is thoroughly worked out" (*Wiss.*, 245n.).

If we are to have any sympathy or understanding of German idealism after Kant, it is “absolutely” essential that we appreciate this grand sense of “immanence,” of something acting *through* us, like Goethe’s “demon,” or Napoleon’s sense of “destiny.” It is, on the one hand, a quasi-mystical sense of “Oneness” with the world and everyone else, but it is even more a very active, even Freudian sense of a power that is not our own, a drive that infects us but is not our personal creation, literally, a “spirit of the times” that determines our moods, our ambitions, and the direction of our lives. It is this sense that provides the premise of Fichte’s philosophy, this sense of a cosmic self, of “life in general” or simply “the Absolute” who speaks and acts through us. Later, we can try to make some of this more commonsensical, for example, by comparing this abstract theory with the quite everyday sense of being part of a giant and enthusiastic crowd, at a football game, for example, or in the middle of a Napoleonic battle. But for Fichte, it is a premise that has the golden philosophical virtue of its own “self-evidence.” To reflect on oneself is to know, “immediately” of one’s own existence as a self, an ego, a consciousness. (There is no need for us to distinguish these now.) This simple “intellectual intuition,” wrought by any philosopher or philosophy student who takes a moment to take the trouble, is the beginning of all true knowledge, and everything else is but a consequence to be “deduced” from it.⁵⁵

If there is, at the basis of all philosophy, this one grand cosmic self, what must it be like? Kant distinguished two selves, the transcendental knowing self and the noumenal acting self, the “will”; both were activities, but the first was concerned with knowing, the second doing. But it is the main objective of Fichte’s “systematization” of Kant to reject his distinction between two worlds, and two selves; there is but one self, according to Fichte, an active, moral striving self, whose primary concern is moral self-realization. The nature of the self, he thus insists, is to *act*, and its essential goal is the realization of its own freedom. In other words, Fichte interprets the self he has derived from Kant’s first *Critique* with the essential properties of the self of Kant’s second *Critique*. On the one hand, the self is transcendental, whose philosophical premise is its own intuition of itself, but, on the other hand, it is primarily a moral self, free-in-itself, who subsumes even knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, to its moral struggles.

From this extravagant first premise, Fichte proceeds to “deduce” the necessary features of the world, “the whole system of necessary presentations—not only of a world whose objects are determined by

55. Ibid. 38f.

judgment, but also of ourselves as a free practical being under laws . . . ” The notion of “deduction,” remember, is not what we usually think of by that term, namely, a kind of logical inference from one proposition to another. The word comes from Kant’s “transcendental deduction,” which is a demonstration of conditions of possibility, or in Fichte’s words, “it shows that what is first set up as a fundamental principle and directly demonstrated in consciousness, is impossible unless something else occurs along with it, and that this something else is impossible unless a third something also takes place, and so on until the conditions of what was first exhibited are completely exhausted . . . ”⁵⁶ But if the reader looks at this sequence of conditions as a matter of epistemological necessity, which is what we expect to find in Kant’s deduction, the “logic” will seem wholly elusive. The “deduction” is instead like that of the second *Critique*, when Kant becomes openly teleological and derives from the nature of morality those postulates that would make it *reasonable* for a rational creature to be moral, such as, the assurance of one’s own freedom (which Fichte too takes as “the first principle of practical reason”).

The argument takes the form, “What does this absolute self need to prove itself morally?” and the steps in the deduction are the feature of our experience, products of the productive imagination, which make our moral struggles possible. Thus, first of all, the freedom of the self-in-itself is necessary, and then a world of the “not-self” is necessary, according to Fichte, in order for us (that is, the absolute Ego) to have situations and obstacles against which to test ourselves. One might reflect here on the fact that we often enjoy “making things difficult for ourselves,” out of restlessness or in order to test our abilities. The particular things and events of the world are just such a test, just as, for example, God tests Job in the Bible, and, more currently, Goethe’s Lord tests Faust on a bet with Mephistopheles: except, ultimately, we are testing ourselves. And to further the struggle, the absolute Ego divides itself up in a multitude of individual (“conditioned”) egos, who then set about proving their moral worth against each other. This too is “necessary” given the ultimate moral striving that is the goal of the self-in-itself. In fact, in a curious perversion of Leibniz’s “best of all possible worlds” thesis, Fichte argues that this must be the *worst* of all possible worlds, for only this will provide the maximum ground for moral self-realization. After all, what would be morality without temptation, or a sense of duty without individual selfish interests, or heroism without monsters, or good without evil, or striving without obstacles and competition. Thus the absolute Ego

56. Ibid. 25–26.

“posits” the world and individuals, unconsciously as far as we individuals are concerned of course, as postulates of practical reason.⁵⁷

Now all of this must strike the reader as bizarre, to say the least, and if Kant’s view that we in some sense “constitute” our world seemed extreme, Fichte’s view that we actually produce our world for no reason other than to have a moral playground for our collective ego must seem to be the *reductio ad absurdum* of German Idealism. But whether or not all this does indeed follow from Kant, it is essential to point out that nothing in Fichte’s metaphysics is intended to contradict our everyday experience in any way; my desk, dog, and telephone remain exactly as they were; I still have a Friday appointment at the dentist, and the Eiffel Tower, so far as I know, still stands in Paris, with no danger of disappearing in a moment of inattention from the absolute Ego. In fact, Fichte insists that “systematically” accounting for the whole of our everyday experience is exactly what his philosophy is about, and exactly what Kant failed to do, because of his schizoid two-worlds–two-self view and because the world-in-itself, that is, *the* world, has been left inaccessible to us. What Fichte has given us, then, is rather a very different *account* of our everyday experience, though wholly at odds with “dogmatic” common sense to be sure. It is a grand humanistic image in which we are to see ourselves as essentially a unified whole—no small inspiration in those days of “liberty, equality, fraternity” and mutual destruction. It is a call to see ourselves as struggling moral agents—anticipating Fichte’s celebrated *Reden* (“calls”) for a reawakening of the German people in 1807. It is a rationalization of the necessity for turmoil in a seemingly impossible world—not an insignificant task given the German sense of victimization in the face of the forces then gathering in Europe.

The world is still the same, but it is entirely altered too. Our perceptions still seem passively received, but this seeming passivity is now to be explained in terms of our collective unconscious activity. We still see ourselves as individuals, but we can now see through this superficial individualism to the Absolute unity below. And we still see ourselves and the world in finite terms, but beneath it we sense the infinity of a boundless self. The conflicts of the world are nothing less than the conditions we ourselves find necessary for our own self-overcoming. In his *Vocation of Man*, Fichte summed it all up—“Not to know but to

57. Ibid. 72f., 124f., but throughout Part II, esp. 251ff. But in the *Wiss.*, Fichte has remarkably little to say about the opposition of individuals, since he is talking throughout about the “unconditioned” Ego. The conflict of individuals becomes fully evident in his system of ethics (1798) and his *Foundation of Natural Laws* of 1796, from which Hegel borrowed, among other ideas, the famous “Master-Slave” conflict of the *Phenomenology*.

do, is the vocation of Man.”⁵⁸ If the details are obscure, the central message could not be more loud and clear.

One extremely important twist that Fichte gives Kant, though perhaps without realizing its momentous significance, is his variation on Kant’s transcendental arguments concerning the universal necessity of certain concepts of the understanding. Kant insisted that the list of concepts (or “Categories”) he provided in the first *Critique* are necessary conditions for any experience whatsoever. But Fichte has argued that these categories are in fact optional, since we can also approach the world, as in his own ethical idealism, using only the principles applicable to ourselves as agents, not as knowers. Now we have already seen how Fichte uses this conflict between Kant’s first two *Critiques* as a way of promoting his own practical views, but there is another consequence of ultimately greater importance. If we provide the structures or rules to our experience through our imaginative understanding, as Kant had argued, then might it not be the case that we could provide *alternative* sets of imaginative structures or rules to experience—for example, the laws of practical reason. Thus there are at least two sets of structures of reality, which Fichte characterizes as “dogmatism” and “idealism” respectively. If this is so, then the business of providing transcendental arguments becomes much more complex than Kant could have admitted, and the critical philosophy would have to turn away from “deduction” as such to “dialectic,” that is, a contrast and comparison of different conceptual sets, different “forms of consciousness,” as Hegel will call them.

In his later works, Fichte desperately tried to make comprehensible the difficult idealism of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, without much success (even Hegel seemed intent on misunderstanding him). In 1801, for example, he published a “Sunclear Report,” a plea to make the reader understand, but he never succeeded whereas Schelling and Hegel did succeed, in making the idea of an absolute Ego comprehensible to his readers.⁵⁹ In the moral and political sphere, however, where he was far more at home, Fichte scored considerable successes, regaining his university career and his popular following. He defended an orthodox Kantian morality of duty and practical reason, with the one crucial variation that, just as he had attacked the distinction between “Nature and Freedom” in Kant, so too he rejected the unhealthy split between desire and duty, and sought to combine the personal and the

58. *Vocation of Man*, p. 94.

59. In *Wiss.*: “. . . our critics stand firm on their inability to frame the concept required of them (of selfhood versus individuality) . . . it is the *concept of this concept* that they lack and cannot rise to” which reflects, in Fichte’s customary *ad hominem* vitriol, “the weakness in their whole character” (p. 74).

impersonal in the “inner voice” of *conscience*.⁶⁰ He developed the thesis, also defended by Kant, that the purpose of history was the development of human freedom through reason, soon to be picked up most famously by Hegel. In his political writing, the influence of Rousseau was always obvious, and he stressed the role of the State in providing moral education to its citizens as its only real duty. (Once this task is completed, he argued, anticipating Marx and, more immediately, echoing Schiller, the State would “wither away.”) He developed some of the first theories of German socialism, and in accordance with his metaphysics of the general self, he defended a strong sense of authoritarianism and had virtually no sympathy for democracy. Finally, in his most famous performance, he delivered his “Addresses to the German Nation” in 1807–8, in which his increasing sense of aggressive cultural nationalism combined with his charismatic oratory to generally inspire that sense of the German cultural mission which had begun with Goethe and Schiller the decade before, anticipating the strong sense of German nationalism that was soon to pervade the stateless nation and see its first action in the “Wars of Liberation” against Napoleon. Toward the end of the Napoleonic era, Fichte was appointed dean of philosophy and then Rector of the newly established University of Berlin. He died in 1814, living long enough to see the “battle of nations” and the collapse of Napoleon’s empire. His subsequent reputation in Germany was largely due to his influence on politics, which were unsuccessful for another half-century, and German Romanticism, which in fact he despised. He considered his own importance far more dependent upon his development of Kant’s philosophy and his forging an ideology out of the dried bones of academic philosophy. As Hegel privately wrote to Schelling in 1795:

I am sorry for Fichte; beer glasses and patriotic swords have resisted the force of his spirit; perhaps he would have accomplished more if he had left them to their brutality and had only attempted to educate a quiet, select little group.⁶¹

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854) and Das Romantik

It was reserved for *Schelling* to introduce the absolute *finitude* of the *infinite* into philosophy. —K. L. Reinhold

We argued in the preceding chapter that romanticism was a powerful influence in German thinking from the *Sturm und Drang* poets until

60. “In conscience alone is the root of all truth” *Vocation of Man*, p. 101.

61. Letter of 8/30/95, in Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 306.

the end of the 19th century. Generally conceived, romanticism was the emphasis on passion, inspiration, change, and conflict, a near-worship of genius and an almost religious celebration of the arts. In Germany, it was also cultural nationalism. This broad characterization includes both Fichte and Hegel as well as Goethe and Schiller, despite the fact that all four authors denounced "romanticism" as such, as "empty," "sickly," and worse. The confusion is this: At the turn of the 19th century, Romanticism became narrowly defined as a very specific movement, appropriated by Friedrich Schlegel, his brother and his friends, and it was against this narrow and sometimes embarrassing conception that Goethe declared romanticism "sickly" and insisted on himself as "classicist." It was against the inarticulate emulation of *intuition* of this group that Fichte and later Hegel turned their scorn. In the broader sense, we should say that all of these figures were kin to romanticism if not a definitive part of it. But in the narrow sense, Romanticism is an extremely limited movement whose main consequence in Germany was to render a once informative word completely useless.

Schlegel defined "Romanticism" as a search for the "infinite" and "the spirit of modern poetry." The emphasis was on genius and cosmic inspiration, the right of the artist to "break all the rules, and follow himself," but in doing so express the Absolute. Unfortunately, the movement contained few if any geniuses, and their own theories rendered their cosmic consciousness as obscure pretentiousness. Nevertheless, in 1800 Germany *needed* a renewed romanticism, even if not necessarily Romanticism. The innocent enthusiasm of the *Sturm und Drang* movement was no longer appropriate in this post-revolutionary, increasingly threatening world. The sentimental world of Goethe's *Werther* and the atavistic nobility of Schiller's *Robbers* had been replaced by the demand for a very different kind of virtue, in part because of the enormous political tension now so evident throughout Europe, in part because of the new philosophies—Kant's and Fichte's in particular.⁶²

Unfortunately, Romanticism was a world-view without a backbone, an inarticulate philosophy that needed a structure and a spokesman. It was no easy search, given that the very nature of the movement denied philosophy its established role in the search for Truth and

62. The theoretical statement of this new temperament, in the world of letters and the world at large, was Schiller's; in his *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* he described Goethe so flatteringly (as "naïve") that the younger poets happily applied similar descriptions to themselves, and in his *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, he offered an extremely "romantic" (but not in their limited sense) picture of humanity reformed through poetry and aesthetic sensibility. The two views together quite naturally encouraged the poet-as-savior sensibility among the younger poets, and Hölderlin, in particular, had been deeply affected by it.

instead substituted intuition and inspiration. The new Romantics turned at first to Fichte, beneath whose austere and obscure Kantian re-formulations they perceived his dynamic picture of the world as absolute Ego—which much appealed to them, the emphasis on the “productive imagination”—perfectly suited to poetic creativity, and that arrogant moralism that made him their kindred spirit. The poet Novalis, for example, reinterpreted Fichte’s ethical idealism as a “creative” or “magical” idealism, and, following Fichte’s ethical writings, defined himself as one of those “beautiful souls” whose personal free spirit was in perfect tune with the Absolute. (Hegel would parody Novalis in particular in the *Phenomenology*.) The Schlegel brothers turned Fichte’s “intuition of the absolute Self” into a justification for their own role as spokesmen for the Absolute, and in place of Fichte’s unswerving moralism, they substituted an amoral philosophy of art, declaring the individual work of art to be the Absolute represented in finite form. Philosophy in general thus became a matter of inspired intuition, not articulation, where Fichte had insisted that it be a deductive science. Accordingly, Fichte repudiated the movement in his lectures on the “characteristics of the present age” (just as Hegel was to do a year or so later) and insulted most of its main proponents. Meanwhile, the movement had found other defenders—Friedrich Jacobi the student of Kant who pursued the negative side of Kant’s arguments (that we could not *know* the world in itself) to the conclusion that we could intuit the world in itself, including God, only through feeling and intuition. And Friedrich Schleiermacher, who also argued that religious belief had only to do with religious feelings, “convictions of the heart.” (He analyzed these feelings, in turn, as a sense of dependence, prompting Hegel to remark that a dog would make an ideal Christian, on Schleiermacher’s view.) But Schleiermacher was only a preacher, and Jacobi thought “the whole of science is only a game.”⁶³

The champion of Romanticism, therefore, turned out to be Schelling, who was also an intimate member of the Romantic circle in Jena. (He later married the elder Schlegel’s wife, after a short period of scandal.⁶⁴) Friedrich Schelling had been a protégé of Fichte, and his first works were unabashedly Fichtean (with titles like “On the ‘I’ as the Principle of Philosophy” of 1795). He too saw himself as “completing” and “systematizing” Kant’s philosophy, raising it to a “Sci-

63. “Our sciences are merely games which the human spirit invents to pass the time” (quoted by H.S. Harris in his commentary on Hegel’s *Differenz*-essay, p. 166.).

64. In fact, the scandal caused such bitterness in Jena that Schelling left his post at the university; publication of the *Journal* stopped and Schelling’s relationship with Hegel too becomes visibly strained at this time, though it does not turn into outright antagonism until after the publication of the *Phenomenology* in 1807.

ence," but he also thought that Fichte had failed to do so. Fichte had overemphasized the practical to the exclusion of the theoretical, according to Schelling, and he had ignored Kant's own attempts at a synthesis in his third *Critique*. The main themes of Schelling's philosophy, we may say, are the themes of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*—the role of art in synthesizing the natural and the practical, understanding and reason, and the teleological view of the Universe as a whole, the ultimate "finality" of Nature.

Schelling never achieved a single philosophical system, like Fichte and Hegel, and perhaps this was one of the reasons he did not endure as a major figure in the history of philosophy, despite the fact that he anticipated almost all of Hegel's main themes. Historians of philosophy like single philosophies (or at most two, the "early" and the "later") but Schelling was publishing a different system every year in the last decade of the century, prompting Hegel to comment that "he was educating himself in public."⁶⁵ It was a comment prompted by jealousy, for Schelling, although five years younger than his college friends, had already published six books and held a chair in philosophy when he was only twenty-three. But it was true that he changed his mind on major issues almost yearly, and however that may attest to a certain liveliness and open-mindedness, it did betray a certain flirtatiousness with the Absolute that the Germans, looking for some ideological stability, could not long tolerate.

The key to Schelling's philosophy or philosophies is "the Absolute," or what he often calls "infinity." The words strike us as arrogant and extravagant, but what they actually mean is more modest; "absolute" means simply "without qualification," undivided. "Infinity" means "complete" or "self-contained." (In Hegel's *Logic*, years later, he would introduce his famous distinction between the "genuine infinite," which is autonomous and self-contained, and the "spurious infinite," which simply goes on and on and on. It is important to remember that the complex mathematics of infinity did not begin until the late 19th century with Cantor, so Schelling's and Hegel's use of the term is much more primitive than ours.⁶⁶)

Knowledge or behavior that is limited, for example, "conditioned"

65. In 1795, he published his Fichtean "The 'I' as the Principle of "Philosophy"; in 1796 he published his book on "Natural Law," and in 1797 his first "Ideas towards a Philosophy of Nature." In 1798 he published his "The World-Soul as a Hypothesis for Physics" and the completion of his first system of the *Philosophy of Nature*, then *Speculative Physics*, and in 1800 his *System of Transcendental Idealism*. The next year he redid his *Philosophy of Nature* and published a kind of intellectual summary, "My System of Philosophy." He was, by this time, only 26 years old!

66. Indeed, it would not be wholly unfair to say that the concept was not a mathematical concept at all, but more like the ancient Greek conception of "boundless" (*apeiron*).

by the senses, the forms of intuition, the categories, or the dictates of morality, is therefore only "finite," not infinite or absolute. Such knowledge and behavior has its essential place in human life, of course, but it must be made sense of in the light of the whole, the absolute or infinite unity of human experience. It is an image which, simply stated, seems to us unobjectionable, even trivial: the world is one, and our experience of it is a unified whole (or what Kant called—with reference to knowledge—"the transcendental unity of consciousness"). Any philosophy that renders the world or our experience of it into separate (and therefore "finite") segments is therefore incomplete and inadequate, and this is just what we find in both Kant and Fichte (according to Schelling and Hegel).⁶⁷

The Absolute is also a poetic image—the ultimate romantic metaphor of cosmic harmony and "being at one with the universe, which is why some thinkers, Jacobi and the Romantics especially, insisted that this ultimate unity could only be "felt" or "intuited," not demonstrated in the necessarily limited ("finite") world of concepts and language. Thus it is that Hegel and Schelling tried desperately in their convoluted language to demonstrate that reason could do this job, and their starting points were Kant, of course, and the poets, the great Goethe for one and, closer to home, Schelling's and Hegel's mutual friend, Friedrich Hölderlin. It was Hölderlin who best captured the romantic insistence on "the oneness of everything" and the need to "re-establish man's identity with nature." And it was Kant who set the terms for this identity, via Fichte, to show that a single absolute or infinite Self was at work in both nature and individual human consciousness. The work of philosophy, therefore, was to make this absolute self explicit. For Hegel, this would mean a turn to the history of philosophy, and human thought in general, to show that all of our various "forms of consciousness" were striving to realize this ultimate sense of absolute identity. For Schelling, however, the romantics still had their influence and so, for him, the discovery of the absolute identity of Nature and Spirit had to be found through intuition, through religion, and—what endeared him to the romantic poets—through art.⁶⁸

67. For instance, in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* and, in 1809, in his *On Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutmann (Chicago: Open Court, 1936), pp. 21f., and in Hegel's *Differenz*-essay, in which this forms the dominant theme of the entire essay, as much as the "difference" between Fichte and Schelling and the superiority of the latter.

68. Schelling's heavy emphasis on physics and the "philosophy of nature" in his early years makes it too easy to neglect his romantic tendencies in the 1800s, for instance, in the *System*, where he says:

The objective world is only the primitive, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the general organon of philosophy—and the keystone of its whole arch—is the *philosophy of art*; . . . art itself [is] the ultimate synthesis of the "objective" and the "subjective."

In contemporary terms, perhaps we can grasp this grand vision better negatively; the search for the Absolute and the infinite is just that sense of integration and meaningfulness that Albert Camus, for one, declared in this century to be no longer believable, with much noise and despair. His is the final disillusion, that there is no God behind or on the scene, that there are no assurances that things will work out right, that justice will prevail, that Kant will have his *Summum Bonum* or Leibniz his "best of all possible worlds." This is that sense that Camus captures through the example of Sisyphus, pointlessly pushing his rock up the mountain, only to have it fall meaninglessly back to the bottom; he scorns the gods, he is defiant, but Sisyphus knows that there is no meaning; his work will amount to nothing.⁶⁹ And Camus himself writes—though the philosophical point is more subtly made by some of his colleagues, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty—of human consciousness straining against an "indifferent universe." All of this is too familiar. But to understand Schelling and Hegel and their times, what we have to appreciate is the fact that they would not have found Camus's imagery familiar; to the contrary, they would have found it nonsensical and obscene. Indeed, the one philosopher who did argue such an image of a "meaningless" universe in their own time, Arthur Schopenhauer, was wholly ignored until much later in the century, and for just this reason.

The demand for a single synthesis of the whole of human experience had been elevated to a philosophical necessity, of course, by Kant. What was taken as a premise by the first Greek philosophers—that reality was one—had become the most persistent problem of philosophy ever since, from Plato to Descartes to Kant, as they divided up reality and experience in a variety of ways, but then found it impossible to bring the parts back together. For Schelling, the search for "the Absolute" or "the infinite" is just this sense of ultimate identity of reality and consciousness, the identity of "Nature and Freedom," the subject matters of Kant's two first *Critiques*.⁷⁰ Schelling, however,

Hegel, in his *Introduction to the Lectures on Aesthetics* in Berlin, (trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) also stresses the "absolute" and "philosophical" nature of art as "the synthesis of objective and subjective, universal and particular." He gives but indirect credit to Schelling, however, which is rendered even more unjust by an unexplained comment in passing that Schelling "distorted" the subject (p. 63). It is worth noting that Hegel there too gives qualified credit to the "Romantic" movement, and the Schlegels in particular;

... greedy for novelty. . . . appropriated from the philosophical Idea as much as their completely non-philosophical . . . natures were capable of accepting, . . . and with great freedom of speech and boldness of innovation, even if with miserable philosophical ingredients, directed a spiritual polemic against their predecessors. (ibid.)

69. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. J. O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1955).

70. Around 1803, Schelling began to describe his philosophy as an *Identitätsphilosophie*, a philosophy of "absolute identity" in which Nature and Freedom were but two

replaces Fichtean "Freedom" with the more religious-toned "Spirit" (*Geist*), and thus the object of his philosophy becomes the synthesis of Nature and Spirit. (In Kant, "the world of freedom" was also the world of God, faith, and religion.) Fichte, he argued, had accomplished such a "synthesis" only by reducing the one to the other, by collapsing all of Nature into a "postulate of practical reason," which he found absurd. In the technical language so often repeated by Schelling and later Hegel, this meant that Fichte had failed to achieve a system, and thus, true Science. But in non-technical language, it simply meant, and the reader will probably agree, that Fichte gave ridiculously little attention to the most obvious fact of our experience, despite its role in the leading question of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, the fact that the world and its objects, in other words, "nature," is given as "objective," in other words, as outside of us and independent of us. Fichte's "positing of the non-ego" still leaves nature only "for us" and not "in itself," not "objective." But how can we understand nature as "objective" in this sense and still achieve an identification of nature and Spirit. It is here that Schelling uses Fichte mainly to go beyond him, although the resemblance remained sufficiently striking so that their audience almost always identified them. (It was this identity, desirable in the absolute Ego but not in Schelling's own personal Ego, that made him encourage his unknown friend Hegel to write his first major piece of philosophy, in which the *differences* between Fichte and Schelling, were emphasized if not exaggerated, to the evident benefit of Schelling.⁷¹)

Schelling also begins his philosophy with a contrast of two kinds of metaphysics, "dogmatism" and "idealism"; Fichte is his example of the latter, Spinoza his example of the former.⁷² Just as Spinoza had failed to achieve a scientific system, however, because of his over-emphasis on "substance" and the downplaying of human freedom, Fichte had failed to achieve a scientific system because he over-played

aspects of one and the same Absolute. But it is worth noting that Fichte argued such an "identity" thesis too, at least with regard to the (non-individual) Ego:

"I, the spiritual entity, and I, the bodily frame in the physical world, are one and the same, merely viewed from two different sides. . ." (*Vocation of Man*, pp. 85–86)

Spinoza too had argued such a view (in which mind and body were but different "attributes" of the One Substance that was the whole of the Universe). In this century, a similar view has been argued, for example by Bertrand Russell, under the titles of "neutral monism" and "dual aspect theory"—the idea that mind and body are but two "aspects" of a single entity.

71. In this *Differenz*-essay, Hegel accuses Reinhold in particular of overlooking the differences between the two, with sophomoric sarcasm: "It is marvellous how he [Reinhold] manages to see nothing but a principle in philosophy as Schelling has established it, nothing but Egoity . . ." In retrospect, of course, we might sympathize with Reinhold, for from a distance of 180 years Schelling and Fichte do indeed seem more alike than different, at least so far as their "systems" are concerned. What is very different is their view of life itself, with which Hegel, however, seems much less concerned.

72. *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p. 347.

freedom and under-emphasized the objectivity of nature. But Fichte had also shown the way to overcome these one-sided semisystems, in his initial intuition of the absolute Ego and his use of Kant's "productive imagination" to generate the not-self. And if Fichte's readers had not understood the *universal* nature of this Ego, Schelling would allow no such misunderstanding. He called it the "Worldsoul" (*Weltseele*) as well as "the Absolute," and it was discovered, by the philosopher, immediately upon reflection, in an "intellectual intuition" exactly as Fichte had described. Whatever the diversity of the universe into things and peoples, in the Absolute one could see the ultimate unity of it all. But this was not enough, according to Schelling, and here is where he went beyond his Romantic friends: one also needed to follow Fichte in "deducing" the nature of this diversity, that is, in showing why the world, which was absolutely one, needed to be so diversified and divided. So he began, following Kant and Fichte, by asking "Why must our experience be as it is?" a question he later transformed into the unfortunate query, "Why must there be anything at all, rather than simply nothing?" But as in Kant and Fichte, this is a quest for a transcendental "deduction," a demonstration of sorts to show why the world seems as it is, why we are as we are, what we can know, what we can believe, what we can hope. But like Fichte, Schelling takes the nature of this deduction to be primarily a *teleological* deduction ("for what purpose?"), like Kant and Fichte's practical deductions. For Schelling as well as Fichte insists that the ultimate nature of the absolute Ego is its *freedom*, so long as this is not misconstrued as foreclosing its theoretical functions as *knower* too, as Fichte had done.⁷³

It is here that Kant's third *Critique* becomes important to Schelling. It is in the *Critique of Judgment* that Kant returns to nature, not as the phenomenal world of the understanding and the causal laws of Newton's physics, but as the "supersensible" universe as a whole, beyond the bounds of our concepts, that is, as infinity, the Absolute. It is here that Kant argues, as he had not in the first *Critique*, that the world must be rationally believed to be purposive, to be ordered, to be harmonious, even if we could never *know* this. Schelling's move, then, is to take this "regulative idea," as Kant called it, and claim it as a centerpiece of *knowledge*, not the kind of knowledge that comes from the understanding, but, even more important, the kind that comes from reason. (Hegel will distinguish these as "reflective" vs. "speculative" philosophy.) This may seem a small and largely terminological move—Kant said this idea could be justified by reason but not *known* to rea-

73. "The beginning and end of all philosophy is—Freedom." (1795)—Schelling, *Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart, 1860), vol. 1, p. 177.

son itself—but it is the key epistemological move from Kant to Hegel, clumsily anticipated by Fichte (who gave too little attention to the concept of knowledge as such), completed by Schelling, and picked up by Hegel. The immediate logical consequence, of course, was that we could know, after all, the world as it is “in-itself,” not the world “outside” of our experience (they all agreed with Kant on that), but the ultimate unity of the world at the base of our experience, which Kant called “the transcendental unity of consciousness” and Fichte and Schelling (Jacobi too) “our intuition of the Absolute.” Our intuition of the absolute Self, argued Schelling in particular, was not just self-reflection; it was an insight into the unity of ourselves with nature too. Schelling’s premise (Hegel’s too) was that we could understand ourselves only as well as we understood nature. Fichte had almost seen this, but he misconstrued the identity by, in effect, denying the independence of nature. But nature, according to Schelling, is nothing other than “slumbering Spirit”; it is “the unconscious self-production of the Absolute, observed or contemplated by reason.”⁷⁴ One can, for specific purposes, consider the one independently of the other (Hegel: “subjective Subject-Object” vs. “objective Subject-Object”). But this is always an abstraction, in the sense of an artificial separation of an integral whole, and it is that immediate philosophical intuition, that is so much the anchor of Romantic poetry as well as Schelling’s philosophy, which will never let us forget that essential fact.

Because Fichte had placed so much emphasis on the “freedom” side of the Absolute, Schelling dedicated most of his efforts to developing the “nature” side. He initiates what he called “the philosophy of nature,” or what today we would call “the philosophy of science.” Today this would be concerned mainly with methods, while Schelling was concerned almost wholly with the teleology of science, or what we might call “creative evolution,” the *purpose* of the laws of nature, not just as logically necessary conditions for one another but as temporal stages in cosmic development. Schelling’s “deductions” then took the form of an ordering of the various forms of science, just as Darwin, a half-century later, would order the various species of living nature. But Schelling would not have abided the causal view of “natural selection” advocated by Darwin, for he firmly believed in a purposive order implanted within nature, a design, as Kant had argued,

74. Echoing Kant, Schelling even says, “in our philosophizing about nature, we *produce* nature.” Cf. Hegel: “It is on account of such charlatanism that the Philosophy of Nature, especially Schelling’s, has become discredited.” (*Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: 1970), p. 1. As is often the case, it is not clear to what extent Hegel considers Schelling one of the “charlatans” or one of their victims.

and ultimately, the Aristotelean *telos* of cosmic self-revelation.⁷⁵ For Schelling, as for some contemporary relativity theorists, the “end” of the world is its own recognition of itself;⁷⁶ ultimately, it is nothing other than its own view of itself. But this does not mean, for Schelling especially, that nature is not “objective,” exists only in our individual minds, or is in any sense not “real.” But it is our (collective) participation in the life of the universe that makes it real, the categories of reason that make it rational.

Kant argued that the order of nature gave us a particular pleasure that he called “aesthetic,” a certain delight in design and meaningfulness which every scientist and bird-and-flower lover knows so well.⁷⁷ Art in general, Kant argued, was the synthesis of “Nature”—let us say the marble a sculptor uses in his work, and “Freedom”—the imaginative work the artist uses to shape the stone. Art combined the understanding—knowing how the laws of everyday physics apply to the carving of marble, for example—and reason which provided the unique insights and inspiration to make this a work of art, a personal expression, instead of a standardized piece of factory statuary. Schelling and the Romantics take this view of Kant’s, and in particular Kant’s celebration of the “genius” that is necessary to achieve this uniqueness, and argue that the work of art is nothing less than the Absolute realized in a finite example. Schelling goes much further; he identifies the Absolute itself with just such an act of creation, namely self-creation, since as Absolute there can be nothing other than itself to create it. The Absolute creating itself, God creating himself, is the ultimate image of Schelling’s philosophy, the progression of the Universe as a whole through various stages culminating in its own recognition of itself as the Universe, that is, by Schelling and his Romantic friends. It is an extravagantly edifying view of the cosmos, “our life is its art.”⁷⁸ But, apart from such an image, there was no way actually to describe this unified self-creation; one could only, if sufficiently sensitive, “see” it, in accordance with the new idealist-Romantic

75. Hegel flirts with the theory of evolution in his *Philosophy of Nature* (§ 249), but he too thoroughly rejects the wholesale contingency which would mark the theory of “natural selection.”

76. For example, John Wheeler, who uses this Hegelian metaphor explicitly in his exegesis of Einsteinian space-time. See, for a popular account, Gary Zukov, *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters* (New York: Morrow, 1979), and my brief discussion in Chapter 4b (pp. 186–187).

77. Kant’s taste in art was notoriously abysmal; in the age of Mozart and Haydn he preferred military band music.

78. Cf. Aristotle, however, in his *Physics*: “if purpose is present in art, it must also be present in nature.”

philosophy. Thus the end product of Schelling's philosophy was to silence the philosopher, much as Wittgenstein was to do a hundred years later: "Whereof one cannot speak, one should remain silent." But Schelling did not remain silent, and Hegel, offended by the suggestion that there was nothing more for him to say, turned bitterly on this aspect of Schelling's philosophy in the *Phenomenology*. But the bulk of Schelling's views, we may anticipate, would be imported wholesale throughout Hegel's first real book. We might say that the skeleton of Hegel's system was not much more than the bones of Schelling's various systems, connected together and given flesh and life by Hegel's unique synthetic genius.⁷⁹

Since this is a book about Hegel, who has received considerable recognition, it may be fitting to give a passing moment's credit to Schelling, for whose unrecognized significance a tear or two must be shed. He was a self-declared genius, and possibly he was one. He was the most sensitive of spirits, appropriate to his role as *romantik* sage. He was a solid philosopher of breath-taking quickness and range, digesting every idea in sight and making it ready for Hegel's easy assimilation. He was an articulate spokesman and an elegant lecturer, unlike Hegel. (Hegel's students described his lecturing style as "exhausted, morose . . . his constant clearing of his throat and coughing interrupting any flow of speech.") But Schelling never could get his precocious systems into a final order, and he was crushed by the rapid ascent of his much slower roommate to the pinnacle of philosophical fame. "I can say of Hegel and his followers that they are eating my bread," he complained years later. But then again, he also accused Fichte of "plagiarism" when it became evident that his teacher, whom he had imitated, agreed with him, and it is probably true that Schelling could never have done what Hegel did do: forge a singularly powerful system that could define the consciousness of an age. As Hegel's student, Heinrich Heine defended his teacher after meeting Schelling in Munich:

He was pushed ignominiously from the throne of thought; Hegel, his major-domo, took the crown from his head and shaved his hair, and the dispatched Schelling now lives like a miserable monk in Munich . . . In Munich, I heard Herr Schelling, when I met him accidentally, speak of Hegel who had "taken his ideas"; and "it is my

79. "The main point in Schelling's philosophy is that it centers around that deep speculative content, which as content is the content with which the whole history of philosophy has had to do. . . . His defect is that the Idea in general, and its distinction into the natural and the ideal world, . . . are not shown forth and developed in themselves through the Concept (*Begriff*). . . . The present standpoint of philosophy is that the Idea is known in its necessity." (*Lectures* 241–45). When Hegel says "the present standpoint of philosophy," he always means himself.

ideas that he has taken" and again "my ideas" was the constant refrain of the poor man . . . Nothing could be more ridiculous than the claim that one owns ideas. Hegel, to be sure, used very many Schellingian ideas in his philosophy; but Herr Schelling after all would never have been able to make anything of these ideas. He always merely philosophized but would never have been able to offer a philosophy.⁸⁰

Schelling got his revenge. After Hegel's death, he was invited back to Berlin to combat the "leftist" clamoring of the young Hegelians, including the young Karl Marx, then a student at the university. His anti-Hegelian lectures inspired at least one of his students, Søren Kierkegaard, to pursue further the attack on Hegel from the side of religious orthodoxy, but the same lectures evidently inspired at least two other students, Friedrich Engels and Michael Bakunin, to attack the Hegelian philosophy, and Schelling too, from precisely the opposite direction.

*"The Difference Between Fichte's
and Schelling's System of Philosophy"*

If the formal task of philosophy is taken to be the suspension of dichotomy, Reason may try to solve it by nullifying one of the opposites and exalting the other into something infinite. This in effect is what happened in Fichte's system. . . . The principle of identity is the absolute principle of Schelling's system as a *whole* . . . For absolute identity to be the principle of an entire system it is necessary that *both* subject and object be posited as Subject-Object. In Fichte's system identity constitutes itself only as subjective Subject-Object. [It] needs an objective Subject-Object to complete it. —*Differenz*-essay (1801)

Hegel's first acknowledged publication was the essay entitled "The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy" (*Differenz des Fichte-schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*)⁸¹ He wrote it in the late spring, early summer of 1801, and it was published in the fall of that year in the journal Hegel was now co-editing with Schelling, *The Critical Journal of Philosophy*. The essay was prompted by, and was superficially a response to, an article by Reinhold, who by now had become an ardent critic of the new idealism of Fichte and

80. *Religion and Philosophy in Germany* and *The Romantic School*, both translated in Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 362.

81. The *Differenz*-essay. See footnote 1, this Chapter.

Schelling. Thus the two-fold purpose of Hegel's article was to defend the idealist movement against Reinhold and to distinguish the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling, which, according to Hegel, Reinhold had conflated and confused. In fact, the largest part of the essay is a critique of Fichte's philosophy and a demonstration that Schelling's system was not only different but very much an improvement on Fichte.⁸²

It must be said, without thereby dismissing Hegel's discussion, that the article was not entirely unbiased. He was not only Schelling's college friend, co-editor, and sometime roommate; he was himself almost wholly known *via* Schelling, and distinguishing Schelling from Fichte was the first step, one can see in retrospect, to his beginning to distinguish himself as well. Indeed, it has been argued convincingly that Hegel had hardly even read Fichte, but relied almost wholly on Schelling's discussions of his philosophy,⁸³ and in any case he was neither fair nor sympathetic to Fichte.⁸⁴

The criticisms themselves were familiar enough; Schelling had made them already. The main complaint was that Fichte had promised a system but had not fulfilled that promise. The conclusion of Fichte's philosophy is a perpetual struggle of ego and world, an "absolute opposition" rather than an absolute identity. Thus Schelling had criticized Fichte for his neglect of the philosophy of nature and attempted to provide a unified system. Indeed, it cannot be stressed too much that this ideal of *unity* was not only the criterion Schelling and Hegel used to determine whether a philosophy was "systematic" or not; it was the very condition of human reason as such, the purpose of every philosophy, whether knowingly or not. In the *Differenz*-essay, Hegel writes, "the sole interest of reason is to suspend . . . antitheses."⁸⁵ The name Schelling had given to this ultimate philosophical unity was "*Identitätsphilosophie*"; the name Hegel gives to the same ideal is "speculative philosophy"—literally, to "see" the whole. (Philosophies which were not concerned with the whole, not speculative, or which failed to transcend the finite (limited), they called "reflec-

82. J.H. Stirling describes Hegel's service to Schelling as "the honorarium or hush money paid by the Unknown to the Known for the privilege of standing on the latter's shoulders" (*Secret of Hegel* (London, 1965), vol. 1, p. 24; also quoted by H.B. Acton in *Introduction to Hegel's Natural Law*, trans. T.M. Knox, (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1975)).

83. Theodore Haering, *Hegel* (Leipzig & Berlin, 1929), p. 610ff.

84. Helmut Girundt's study, *Differenz . . .* (Bonn: 1965), p. 69. Girundt argues that not only was Hegel unfair to Fichte in the 1801 essays, but when Fichte corrected his *Wiss.* in 1804 (in part in response to such criticism) Hegel ignored the corrections and continued to publish, for the rest of his career, objections to Fichte that applied, if at all, only to the edition of 1794.

85. *Differenz*-essay, p. 90.

tive.") Where Fichte had failed and Schelling succeeded, according to Hegel in 1801, was in actually working out a "system" in which this ideal unity was completed.⁸⁶

Of the *Differenz*-essay, Hegel insisted that it was "external" treatment of the two philosophers, an examination from the outside in which they were weighed and compared, but without any attempt to get "inside" their systems and see where they lead. This is what Hegel would do some five years later, in the *Phenomenology*, when he would add his own system to the history of German Idealism as a synthesis and improvement upon both of them.⁸⁷

86. In 1805, however, Hegel was less generous to Schelling; in his lectures, he insisted that Schelling did not yet have a system at all, but was still in process of trying to put one together. (Not incidentally, Schelling was no longer in Jena to defend himself.) In his later *Lectures* in Berlin, Hegel evolved an even more convenient and less sympathetic interpretation of Schelling as an "objective idealism," which conveniently complemented Fichte's "subjective idealism," allowing Hegel to claim his own importance as "absolute idealist."

87. "From the Kantian System and its highest completion," Hegel wrote to Schelling back in 1795, "I expect a revolution in Germany" (April 16, 1795, from Bern). In Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 303.

Chapter Three

Younger Hegel

The great form of the world spirit that has come to cognizance of itself in the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Jacobi is the principle of the North, and from the religious point of view, of Protestantism. This principle is subjectivity for which beauty and truth present themselves in feelings and persuasions, in love and intellect. Religion builds its temples and altars in the heart of the individual. —‘Faith and Knowledge’ (1802)

Hegel did not write nor evidently even think about philosophy as a professional until he was in his thirties. The abstract defender of the Absolute was once a student who disdained “dead concepts,” “mere ideas.” Despite the time he spent with Schelling, he thought his friend’s thinking “too theoretical,” and though he studied in the Tübingen seminary (the *Stift*) for five years, he despised theology. He preferred the concrete questions of history and his ancient studies of Periclean Athens and the world of the Old and the New Testament. He was a “competent” college student, as one might say in an honest but unflattering letter of recommendation, but he was also a prankster and a rebel, and like most of his classmates he was an enthusiastic follower of the on-going revolution in France. Like most of his classmates too, he used his detailed knowledge of the classics to draw an obvious contrast between the sun-bright harmonies of ancient Greece and the pseudo-enlightenment pedantry of the Tübingen seminary. The more pagan elements of our own universities still refer to themselves as “Greeks,” but unlike them, Hegel and his friends took this identity very seriously. By the time he graduated from the Gymnasium, Hegel had read extensively in ancient Greek history, literature, and philosophy. This ancient Athenian ideal, and its contrast with contemporary Christian Germany, would be the focus of Hegel’s early studies and writings, during his years in Tübingen (1788–93), through his years in Switzerland (1793–96), and in Frankfurt with his friend

Hölderlin (1796–1800). Throughout his career, this image of the ancient *polis* would remain an ideal against which all claims to happiness and human reason must prove themselves.¹

Hegel's early writings are completely lacking in the heady questions about the nature of knowledge, the unity of the universe, and the labyrinthian complexities of human consciousness. Insofar as he shows the influence of philosophers, it is Plato and Aristotle (as moralists, not metaphysicians), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (*Emile*, not the *Social Contract*) who are his models. He had read both Kant and Fichte, but their influence on Hegel was almost entirely limited to their writings on religion; the revolutionary effects of their over-all philosophies seemed not yet to affect him.² In general, we should say that Hegel was tremendously influenced by the Enlightenment in its least philosophical aspects: Lessing's emphasis on religious tolerance and the general attack on superstition and prejudice; Rousseau's stress on the importance of education and the general notion of the "perfectibility of humanity"—and "man's natural goodness." Hegel also read or at least knew of the new political economists from England, particularly the two Adams (Ferguson and Smith), who were having an enormous effect in Germany at the time, despite the fact that capitalism and the industrial revolution had yet to have any effect there at all.³ Hegel was particularly influenced by Schiller's use of these readings, in his contrast between the "fragmented" men of the modern world with the "harmonious" and "whole" man of "nature," which fit in so well with Hegel's own growing sense of what later would be called "alien-

1. See, for example, Raymond Plant, *Hegel* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973); but also James Schmidt, who much modifies this claim in his "Recent Hegel Literature," *Telos* no. 46, Winter 1980–81, esp. pp. 130–135.

2. For such claims I have for the most part depended upon H.S. Harris's monumental study of the younger Hegel, *Hegel's Development*. I suspect, Professor Harris would dispute much of the interpretation I have drawn from his researches, but what seems to emerge from his study and Hegel's own pre-1800 writings is an almost remarkable indifference on Hegel's part to some of the grand ideas that were encircling him. In January 1795 Schelling writes Hegel: "who can entomb himself in the dust of antiquity, when his own time is in motion every instant, sweeping him along with it?" Harris tells his *Erziehungsroman* as Hegel's *discovery* of philosophy in 1796, in Berne, just before Hegel joined Hölderlin in Frankfurt. For Hegel's changing attitudes toward philosophy, see esp. Harris, pp. xviii–xix, 33ff, 68 ("not much more interested in 'Kant and metaphysics' than he was in his lectures and classes"). On Hegel's first reactions to Kant, see pp. 104ff.

3. A good but brief reading of Hegel and Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, and the British political economists in general, is Raymond Plant's *Hegel*; a more extensive but dubious interpretation of the young Hegel in the light of political economy and the more materialist concerns of the world is Georg Lukacs, *The Young Hegel*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975). For a more balanced account of Hegel and the political economists see James Schmidt, "Recent Hegel Literature," p. 130f. Whatever is made of Hegel's reading however, the fact that he read these works at all should lend ample support to the worldly side of his interests.

ation"—not being at peace with oneself, or society, or "nature."⁴ And he was influenced too—though less than is often suggested—by the anti-Enlightenment figure Herder, who emphasized the importance of history and the specificity of particular cultures.⁵

For the scholar interested in Hegel's development, no single question seems to me more pressing, and more difficult to answer, than the relatively sudden and certainly late transformation of Hegel's thinking from these mostly practical and cultural Enlightenment humanist concerns, culminating in his shared nostalgia for the "natural harmony" of the early Greeks, to the ponderous, abstract, and obscure philosophizing for which he is so well known today. Why did this most unscholarly and philosophically pedestrian mind make the turn to the most abstract questions of "systematic" philosophy? Why should the *Phenomenology* begin with the questions of knowledge and reality, with which Hegel had never shown the slightest interest until in his thirties? Why should philosophy and "the Concept" have so come to obsess a thinker whose early prejudices were entirely pragmatic and concrete, wholly against "dead thinking" and "mere understanding," who seemed solely dedicated to the business of living?

These are not our questions here.⁶ It is enough for us that Hegel did undergo this transformation, for whatever personal, professional, and intellectual reasons, and that he did begin the *Phenomenology* with an introduction and at least three chapters on straight epistemology, and that he did become obsessed with "the Concept" and "the Absolute" (through the auspices of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling). What we need to ask in this Chapter is only what themes and problems these later concerns were brought in to answer; in other words, what were the motivating images of Hegel's thinking? We have briefly reviewed "the spirit of his times"; we have cursorily reviewed his most immediate philosophical influences. In this Chapter, for what

4. In Hölderlin; "These are hard sayings and yet I say them because they are the truth. I can think of no people as torn apart as the Germans . . . there are no humans. Is it not like a field of battle where hands and arms and other limbs lie scattered in pieces while the blood of life drains away into the soil?" *Hyperion*, trans. W. Trask (New York: Ungar, 1965).

5. Charles Taylor in his *Hegel*, takes Herder to be one pole of influence for the whole of Hegel's philosophy; the other pole, according to Taylor, is Kant (See his Ch. 1, "The Aims of a New Epoch"). For a more extensive discussion of Herder's complex relation to the Enlightenment, see I. Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (New York, 1976).

6. The definitive work on this, I believe, is Harris. Though I am interested mainly in Hegel as a "living" philosopher (in 1985 he will be 215) it is important to take his biographical peculiarities as well as his times into account, and we shall do so periodically in the pages to follow. Cf. G.R.G. Mure: "The biography of a philosopher gains importance only so far as he fails to express himself fully in his writings, and then it serves to explain his failure rather than his philosophy" (*The Philosophy of Hegel* (London: 1945), p. xvii).

it's worth, I should like to come to some understanding of the questions that Hegel asked *before* he became a philosopher, before he yielded to the temptations of "system" and "science" to enter the profession of professors.

Hegel, like most great philosophers, was ultimately concerned with that vague set of questions clumsily summarized by the phrase "the meaning of life." Living in a world in which the established assurances of religion had been seriously undermined and a new and virtually "absolute" priority had been given to human existence, the question—What is that existence worth?—had lost its old and easy answers. In a world overrun by Napoleon and torn apart by revolution, in which all authority had been called into question, the rationality—or should we even say "sanity"—of the modern age was seriously in question, and not a few of Hegel's contemporaries were willing to call it "insane," though some by way of criticism, others by way of praise. Long before Hegel began to write his *Phenomenology*, his thinking was dominated by a single image, derived most immediately from Rousseau and the Enlightenment, dressed in the idealized "harmonies" of the ancient Greeks and nurtured by German Protestantism and poetry. It was the image of humanity as a whole, unified after centuries of division and warfare.⁷ In French Enlightenment terms, it was the image of "perfectibility," cultivated and realized through a long and painful education. It was an absolute humanism, ruled by human reason, open to human freedom, and making possible human happiness. In German poetic terms, it was the theological image of *Bildung*, a three-thousand-year period of growth suddenly culminating in a rebirth of sorts, a dramatic transformation to an entirely new stage of development, a "redemption of the human spirit"—in the religious idiom of the times.

In the *Phenomenology* Hegel announces this "new world." But more than ten years before the *Phenomenology*, while still a student in Tübingen, Hegel was already asking the same questions, "How could this new world come about?" "What is the purpose of human existence?" "Who are we?" And inevitably, given such questions and the context in which they were asked, Hegel's attention was turned to the nature of religion.

7. "It is the vocation of our race to unite itself into a single body" (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, p. 120).

The Vocation of a Non-Scholar

The youthful genius of a people—senses itself and rejoices in its strength, falls ravenously upon anything new and is most vitally concerned with it, but turns again and leaves it to seize on something else.⁸

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born on August 27, 1770, the same year as Beethoven, his spiritual contemporary, and a year after Napoleon, his world historical hero. It was the year of Kant's dissertation in Königsberg, in which the first signs of the "Copernican" Revolution appeared, and it was the same year that Goethe was pouring his own youthful heart into *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Hegel was the son of a minor bureaucrat in Stuttgart, then a small town in the duchy of Württemberg, infectiously near the French border and just east of the romantic Black Forest. His biography, like all biographies in the cosmic perspective of universal history, is eclipsed by his work.⁹ His mother died when he was eleven. He had extremely close ties with his sister. We do not know whether he enjoyed macaroni and cheese as much as Beethoven did, though we can, given the tenor of the times, make educated guesses about his sex life (minimal) and drinking preferences (Rhine wine—cheap). The psycho-sexual historian might well play with the frequent masturbatory imagery of the *Phenomenology* ("the Absolute disporting with itself," "in and for itself") and we might much more respectably follow H. S. Harris's fine account of Hegel's youthful reading, term papers, and letters.¹⁰ But in our at least minimal fidelity to Hegel's own methods it is essential to forgo the pleasures of scholarly voyeurism and restrict ourselves to *ideas in their context*. There is an important sense, therefore, in which the individual philosopher Hegel—his family life, sexual exploits, student interests, and professional accomplishments are "accidental," incidental, unimportant, negligible.¹¹

To thus "explain" Hegel's universal humanism, however, is thereby

8. From the Tübingen essay of 1793, translated by H.S. Harris in his *Hegel's Development*, pp. 481–507.

9. A concise biography (with pictures) is Franz Wiedmann's *Hegel: An Illustrated Biography*, trans. by J. Neugroschel (New York: Pegasus, 1968). The standard sources are Theodore Haering, *Hegel: Sein Wollen und sein Werk*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1929, 1938); Rudolf Haym, *Hegel und seine Zeit* (Berlin, 1857); and, by one of his students, Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Berlin, 1844).

10. Harris's book covers mainly Hegel's intellectual development from his Gymnasium years in Stuttgart until his first professional position, in Jena, in 1801.

11. Lest I be misunderstood (again), I am not denying either the interest or the importance of biography in relationship to an author's ideas; I am saying that, *as a philosopher*, an author must let his ideas stand on their own, and the motivation behind them is to be brought in mainly to make sense of a text or explain it when the author

to anticipate the extent to which he is *not* the "absolute" spokesman for his times. In fact, historically, his and Goethe's rejection of German nationalism shows them to be spokesmen for only a very small and unsuccessful segment of the German sympathies of 1800. Let us just say, then, that Hegel succeeded to grow, more or less intact, to adolescence. We probably ought to mention the fact that Württemberg was a Protestant territory dominated by Catholics (cf. Ulster today), so that Hegel grew up in a state of religious tension (the young Marx comes to mind here too) and he had a pronounced prejudice against Catholicism. (As a teenager he referred to priests as "those fat luxuriating most profane men.")¹² The strong republican political sentiments of Württemberg ought also be mentioned, since the proximity to the French and the distance from Berlin played no small role in Hegel's political allegiances—for example, the fact that he was, throughout the Napoleonic period, an enthusiastic defender of the emperor, a conscientious objector to German nationalism and the "Wars of Liberation." He was visibly joyed at the defeat of Prussia and the frustration of German nationalism. Like Goethe, he remained at most a cultural nationalist, using the German language and the new ideas of German Idealism to further the enlightenment of the human "Spirit" as a whole.¹³

Hegel entered the Stuttgart gymnasium in 1777. H. S. Harris gives us an account of Hegel's studies and performance there, including some detailed accounts of his high-school essays on Greek and Roman religion, his reading of Lessing, and his early attitudes to the *Sturm und Drang* movement.¹⁴ For our purposes, we need only say that Hegel did well in school but not brilliantly; he read voraciously, particularly in the classics but also in history, physics, and literature. The temper of his education was thoroughly defined by the Enlightenment, though not the critical Enlightenment of Kant nor the radical Enlightenment of Rousseau and Voltaire but the Jewish-German *Aufklärung* of Lessing and Mendelssohn and the popular philosophy of Christian Garve.¹⁵ The German writers stressed practical wisdom and education (*Bildung*), religious tolerance and the compatibility of religions in a way that particularly appealed to the young Hegel. Their

himself has failed to make his meaning clear. Unfortunately, this will often be the case in our discussion of the *Phenomenology*. Cf. Mure's comment, n.6.

12. Harris, p. 16. See also pp. 21, 26, 43.

13. See, for example, Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), esp. chs. 1 and 2; and Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (New York: Putnam, 1963).

14. Harris, pp. 1–47.

15. *Ibid.*, esp. 17f., which includes a selection from Mendelssohn's "What Is Enlightenment?" of 1784, copied by Hegel into his own notebooks. The emphasis on "*Bildung*" and the "Vocation of Man" (*Bestimmung des Menschen*) prefigures much that is to come

emphasis on what Hegel called "subjectivity" found a congenial home in his own disdain of "book-learning" and "dead thinking," and even in high school he worshipped the "naïve" simplicity of idealized Greeks in contrast to the cold and clever catechisms of his own religion.¹⁶

At the age of seventeen, Hegel entered the theological seminary (the *Stift*) at Tübingen.¹⁷ At no time did he consider entering the ministry; with his friends Schelling and Hölderlin he attended the *Stift* simply because the state then sponsored his education. (In fact, in his early essays, Hegel explicitly attacks this shift in responsibility from state to church in the all-important matter of education, which ought to be the main if not the sole function of government.) He was somewhat without direction, compared with his friends, for example, who seemed to have found their talents early. (Schelling, who was five years younger, was already making a name for himself in philosophy by the time he was seventeen.) Hegel briefly considered a legal career, following the footsteps of his father, but never seems to have followed through with this idea. Like most college students, his life and ambitions were little affected or influenced by most of the courses he studied. His dominant influence was the French Revolution and the local radicalism it inspired among his peers. They devoured the French newspapers. They read and discussed Voltaire and Rousseau. They traded their own half-baked and quarter-serious revolutionary fantasies. And, of course, they drank, partied, played, and complained about the predictable poverty of their sensual lives. They hated their theology, which they called "the old sourdough," but they read, studied, and steeped themselves in that stew of Enlightenment Lutheranism, *Sturm und Drang* romanticism, classical idealism, and adolescent fantasy that defined the spirit of a German generation.¹⁸

The theology that was force-fed to Hegel and his friends was itself a confused blend of orthodox Protestantism and the new Enlightenment rationalism. It is important for us to remember that Kant, who to us is one of the "classics" in the history of philosophy, was then the hottest intellectual fashion, and the series of books which we now dust and catalog was then just appearing, often serialized in journals before proper publication. With this in mind, Hegel's early indifference

in the literature and philosophy of the final decade of the century. See also James Schmidt, "Recent Hegel Literature," pp. 126–27.

16. Harris, p. 140, on the *Buchstabenmensch* of the Enlightenment, the vain sense of superiority of the "man of letters."

17. A short personal portrait is in Wiedmann, ch. 2. A detailed intellectual portrait is Harris, ch. 2.

18. Wiedmann, p. 18ff.; Harris, p. 58ff.; Rosenkranz, p. 25ff. But see Schmidt, p. 127f.

to Kant is particularly striking.¹⁹ He evidently had read Kant's first *Critique* for class as early as 1790, but seems not to have been profoundly affected by it. Kant's religion book would not appear until after Hegel's graduation, though its main arguments had been serialized in journals while Hegel was in school. The primary basis of the new rational theology was Kant's second *Critique* (*of Practical Reason* of 1788), but it was so distorted and trivialized by pedants that Hegel and Schelling often lampooned the petty Kantians for their translation of every argument into "a postulate of practical reason." Neither of them saw, at least not yet, the more radical elements in Kant's philosophy, and so their view of Kant's significance was distorted—an important point in understanding their later reaction both to his work and to the Enlightenment in general.²⁰ Fichte's *Critique of All Revelation* would not appear until 1793 either, but Fichte's name was already known in radical circles, and it is worth noting that when his *Critique* did appear both Hegel and Schelling considered it to have *reactionary* tendencies, even while it was generally considered a radical thesis.²¹ Their own radicalism was ill-defined, however, and by the time Hegel and his friends became intellectually sophisticated enough to define it, they had largely outgrown it. Or rather, the world of the early French Revolution had passed and turned to Terror. And by the time the three friends had graduated, the upheavals in France had already begun to anticipate a twenty-year international war which would leave nothing in Europe ever the same again.²²

Freedom, Feeling, and Folk-Religion

What arrangements are requisite in order that the doctrines and the force of religion should enter into the web of human feelings, become associated with human impulses to action and prove living and active in them . . . ? —Hegel (1793)²³

19. Harris, pp. 68, 79, 107.

20. Cf. Hegel's enthusiastic comment to Schelling, in 1795: "From the Kantian system and its highest completion I expect a revolution in Germany . . ." (from Berne, April 16th, translated in Kaufmann, p. 303). But see Schmidt, p. 139: "placed in context [Schelling's "esoteric" philosophy], 'I expect a revolution in Germany' loses a good deal of its fire."

21. Harris, p. 108 and pp. 187–89.

22. Alexandre Kojève, *An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); and Jean Hyppolite, "The Significance of the French Revolution in Hegel's *Phenomenology*," in *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. J. O'Neill (New York: Basic Books, 1969) pp. 35–69.

23. Tübingen essay, in Harris.

Even if they rejected theology, the young intellectuals of Tübingen retained their view that religion itself was in some sense “natural” and “necessary.” They believed that the French Revolution had erred precisely in its rejection of religion and its unhealthy separation of state and church. They despised Robespierre but they would agree with his Rousseauian belief that the state requires a spiritual base, a moral sense to guarantee virtue to freedom.²⁴ Their ideal, accordingly, was the ancient “folk” religion of the Greeks and the spiritual-political unity of the Greek *polis*.²⁵ The Greeks needed no “sourdough” theology to rationalize their religion; it was wholly justified by its role in the communal life. The Greeks had no need of an “intellectual apprehension of God,” the corruption of religion that made Christian theology possible. In that most “natural” of worlds, morality, religion, community, and politics were one, a single communal feeling, free of the shallow hypocrisy and fragmentation of this modern world. But the modern age was infused with the spirit of Christianity, and Germany was defined by the Reformation. Was Christianity itself responsible for the corruption of human nature, then?—or was there *something* beneath the theological “sourdough” which would allow Christianity too to function as a “folk” religion, unifying society rather than breaking it apart?

While still in Tübingen, Hegel wrote what is usually considered to be his first major attempt to assess the essential nature of the Christian religion. This was in the summer of 1793, soon after Fichte had visited Tübingen and just as the first installments of Kant's *Religion* were being published. But the dominant influences of the essay, though never mentioned, are Hölderlin, with whom Hegel had so often discussed these issues, and Rousseau, whose vision of human nature defines not only Hegel's student idealism but his later philosophy as well.

Nature has buried in every man a seed of the finer feeling that springs from morality, it has placed in him a sense for what is moral, for ends that go beyond the range of mere sense; to see that this seed of beauty is not choked, that a real receptivity for moral ideas and feelings actually grows out of it, this is the task of education [*Bildung*]
—religion is not the first thing that can put down roots in the mind, it must have a cultivated plot there before it can flourish.²⁶

24. See Hyppolite, p. 58; Harris, p. 114n.

25. The main theme of Harris's study; see also Raymond Plant, *Hegel* esp. chs. 1 and 2. For an alternative reading, see Stanley Rosen, *G.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to His Science of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), who sees Hegel very much through the eyes of the Greek metaphysicians but hardly at all in terms of his youthful worship of their form of life (p. 3).

26. In Harris, p. 485.

Hegel's definitive quest, in other words, is to seek out the kind of society—culture, religion, philosophy—within which these “natural” human virtues can be developed. This Rousseauian ideal of inborn potential, struggling to manifest itself through a hundred inadequate cultural and conceptual manifestations, will also be the key to the *Phenomenology*. In this first essay, it is a simple Rousseauian contrast, the fertile soil of ancient Athens and the corrupt theological dogmatism of the Protestantism of the *Stift*.

The Tübingen essay was never completed or fit for publication, but the first sense the reader of the *Phenomenology* will get on looking through it—and the other early writings—is clarity and straightforwardness. There is little sign of philosophical talent here, in fact, there is some conceptual confusion and inconsistency; but the obscurity of Hegel's later philosophical professionalism is not to be found there. His concerns are simply stated, and his questions tend to be historical and cultural rather than conceptual. The answers, accordingly, tend to be factual rather than “speculative,” which means that the general direction of Hegel's later writings can here be ascertained with a minimum of interpretation. That direction is this: within the framework of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason and the rational society, how can we moderns come to approach the happy sense of cultural unity which the ancients enjoyed “naïvely”? The need for philosophy, Hegel will argue ten years later, is precisely this loss of unity, “when the might of union vanishes from the life of men” (*Differenz*-essay). But now, before he has discovered philosophy, the question remains an appeal to history: whence Christianity, which has replaced the pagan harmonies of the Greeks to define our fragmented lives?²⁷

The premise of the first essay—and almost all of Hegel's subsequent writings—is that religion is *not* the highest human endeavor but is rather a single aspect of human life, whose purpose is to serve human happiness and virtue. A successful religion appeals not just to the intellect—which Hegel sees as the inhuman corruption that has degraded the Christian religion—but also to “the heart,” from which fancy, feeling, and sensibility must not go away empty-handed.²⁸ (4) Such a religion Hegel calls “subjective,” and it is Greek folk religion, with its emphasis on shared feelings, rituals, and ceremonies, that is its best example. The antithesis of such a religion, “objective” religion, is theology that Hegel had learned in the *Stift*:

27. The obvious appeal here is to Lessing and his *Education of Mankind* and Schiller and his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*; the core of the argument, and the core of Hegel's philosophy, is this modern sense of “fragmentation” versus the ancient ideal of “harmony.”

28. In Harris, p. 499.

As soon as there is a dividing wall between life and doctrine—or even just a severance and long distance between the two of them—there arises the suspicion that the form of religion is defective—either it is too much occupied with idle word-games, or it demands a level of piety from men that is hypocritical because it is too high—it is in conflict with their natural needs, with the impulses of a well-ordered sensibility . . . ²⁹

Hegel does *not* thereby reject the ideal of “rational religion,” and he makes it understood that “universal reason” is the basis of every subjective religion. What he does reject is that cold and clever claptrap which *talks* religion but, in its emphasis on correct doctrines and nit-picking arguments, its delight in logical proofs and scholastic demonstrations, *feels* nothing.³⁰ It is irony that it is just this contrast, and even the same terminology, that will be used *against* Hegel by Kierkegaard, a half-century later, and, suspiciously, it is this “subjectivism” that Hegel attacks in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*.³¹ But Hegel clearly insists (and it is for us an open question whether he ever gives up this attitude) that a meaningful religion must be subjective, must appeal first of all to human feelings and practices, and whatever doctrines it contains must be wholly subservient to that end. The purpose of religion is to make us better human beings.³² That Kantian theme resounds throughout Hegel’s essays, and in 1799, when Hegel turns against Kant, it is partly on the basis of this Kantian principle that he does so. And, like Kierkegaard years later, the emphasis on feeling remains too, so much so that his first attack on Kant, in an essay called “The Spirit of Christianity,” is an attempt to give the emotion of *love* the exalted place that Kant gives to practical reason and morality.³³ But unlike Kierkegaard and Kant too, there is a *social* dimension to Hegel’s view of religion. Religion serves life through its ceremonies and practices; its rituals, however silly or meaningless to the cold Enlightenment eye of an outsider, are the very “heart” of a society, pumping life and the sense of community through its members. This is what makes a religion a “folk” religion, not feeling but community.

29. Ibid. 504–5.

30. Ibid. 483.

31. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941): “The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent (p. 173). In the *Phenomenology*, ¶ 6–9.

32. In an essay called “The Positivity of the Christian Religion,” in 1795 Hegel writes, “The aim and essence of all true religion, and of our religion included, is human morality” (*Hegel’s Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 68 (*Early Theo. Mss.*; Positivity-essay).

33. “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” is in Knox, *Early Theo. Mss.*, pp. 182–301, with a fragment on “Love,” pp. 302–8.

The problem with objective religion and theology is not so much that it is tedious and effete so much as the fact that it is socially empty. It serves only an elite and isolated bourgeois or ecclesiastical community and not the culture at large. It tends to deaden social spirit instead of providing its life blood and to do just the opposite of what religion ought to do: to fortify communal feelings rather than distinguish individual knowledge and cleverness.³⁴

Eventually, Hegel's most important single difference with Kant (also with Kierkegaard) will be this emphasis on the primacy of community rather than individual autonomy. It is culture that provides shared feelings, the springs of our actions, not practical reason, duty, or mere psychology. It is good upbringing that makes a person moral—or immoral—not the dutiful dictates of rationality alone, and here Hegel shows his important similarities with Greek ethics, in particular, the ethics of Aristotle.³⁵ The individual has "meaning" only insofar as he or she is a member of society; religion has a meaning only insofar as it is this feeling of shared unity. Individual faith—the key to both Kant and Kierkegaard—is of little importance. Culture is what is important, and the basis of all religion for Hegel is the *cult*—the religious community. It is urgent that we immediately say that Hegel distinguishes two kinds of cults (in 1795, not 1793), one whose common bond is the feeling of unity itself, another whose bond is shared paranoia and mutual defensiveness. It is the latter kind of cult to which our attention has often been drawn as an object of loathing or fear, in which "brainwashing" and "kidnapping" charges so often appear; but then, assuming this is a distinction worth making, one can see that Christianity too, in fact every religion, at least at the beginning, was once a cult. And to be a religion worthy of the name, according to Hegel, it must remain a cult as well. (Large societies, he will later argue, stretch these intimate bonds to the breaking point; thus the Roman empire, for example, degenerated into alienated individualism just because it lost the sense of unity it had once enjoyed as a republic.)³⁶

It is important to notice that, if "subjective" religion is shared feeling, then "subjective" does not mean what we (and Kant and Kierke-

34. At one point in the Tübingen essay, Hegel summarizes the three considerations of a "folk religion"—reason, emotion, and community (Harris, p. 499):

With respect to objective doctrine

With respect to ceremonies.

- I. Its doctrines must be grounded in universal reason.
- II. Fancy, heart, and sensibility must not thereby go empty away.
- III. It must be so constituted that all the needs of life—the public affairs of the State are tied in with it.

35. See ch. 9, "Hegel's Ethics."

36. See the Positivity-essay of 1795, particularly p. 151ff.

gaard) often mean by that term, something “merely personal.” In fact, just the opposite is the case, since Hegel explicitly claims that what is “subjective” is precisely what is universal, that is, true to our “natural” sentiments—our human nature—and therefore common to all people. It is in this sense that religion is “natural” and “necessary” to human life, and it is essential that we appreciate the degree to which Christianity does *not* have a special place in this concept of religion. In fact, it has less of a place than pagan cults, in which the role of community is made primary. It is also important once again to appreciate the influence of Rousseau and the sentimentality of the Enlightenment, not just the stress on feelings but the emphasis on basic, “natural,” and therefore universal feelings. Accordingly, Hegel argues that there is but one “true” religion, based on this sense of community, but that “objective” religions can be “of any stripe.” In other words, it is objectivity that is localized, a reversal of the usual senses of these terms that must be kept in mind when we see them so often repeated in the *Phenomenology*.³⁷

Kant was enormously influenced by Rousseau, and Hegel was influenced by both of them. It is the Kantian emphasis on morality and practical reason that forms the standard by which Hegel measures religions, but it is the Rousseauan emphasis on sentiment that is ultimately more important for him. Since we have already emphasized the unflinching Enlightenment basis of Hegel's thinking at this time, it is equally important for us to appreciate his ambivalence toward certain features of Enlightenment and certain consequent leanings toward Romanticism. Rousseau, after all, became the patron philosopher of the Romantics, even though he was clearly a member of the Enlightenment as well. (Actually, it was Rousseau the novelist and author of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, not the political philosopher and author of *The Social Contract*, who was the Germans' patron.) Hegel's main complaint, more a product of his *Stift* education than an insight into the times, was the fact that “enlightenment” restricted itself to the *understanding*, a complaint which he repeats throughout this early essay.³⁸

Considering the enthusiasm of the French Enlightenment, of course, which if anything was too limited in understanding and impetuous in its revolutionary action, this is a strange charge indeed. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel quips sarcastically, “Enlightenment; with pure in-

37. For example, in the section entitled “Unhappy Consciousness,” *Phenomenology*, 207ff.

38. In Harris, p. 488ff. “Religion gains very little from the understanding, whose operations . . . are more apt to numb the heart than to warm it. . . .”

sight this will solve the problems of the world." But even looking at the *Aufklärung* authors—Lessing and Mendelssohn—one wonders where Hegel finds such over-emphasis on understanding and neglect of practice. What is indeed missing is the radical political dimension of French Enlightenment, and one might well speculate to what extent if any Hegel is still, in 1793, a closet revolutionary, at least in sentiment.³⁹ But the more important point is to appreciate, beneath the criticisms and the unfair charge that Enlightenment as such was mere dry theory, the extent to which Hegel's whole philosophy is founded on just those same Enlightenment principles—the healthy sense of an intrinsically virtuous and perfectible human nature, common to all humankind, that anxious but still optimistic sense of the bright new world, harmonious as that of the ancients, just coming into being through Enlightenment philosophy and its political manifestations in France, and, most of all, that powerful sense of critical reason, *practical* reason, through which the past could be comprehended and the present understood.

The themes of Hegel's early essay, then, might be summarized as an Enlightenment *credo*, but the Enlightenment of Rousseau, not the more materialist Enlightenment of some of the other French *philosophes*. In his emphasis on sentiment and feeling, universal reason and tolerance, Hegel shows himself to be clearly in line with the *Aufklärung* of Lessing and Mendelssohn, the sentimental Enlightenment of Rousseau, and the "practical reason" of Kant, who will become a far more influential figure a few years later. But it is in his emphasis on ceremonies, rituals, and community, that Hegel is most obviously at odds with Kant and far more faithful to his ancient Greek ideal. A "folk" religion depends not only on universal reason and "fancy, heart and sensibility," according to Hegel, but it is first and foremost a *communal* experience. Religion as such—as we shall see throughout all of his subsequent writings—is nothing less and little more than this shared sense of belonging which is characteristic of the happiest and most "natural" societies.

What is striking about this early essay is Hegel's persistent use of that central image, the *growth* image, the *Bildung* metaphor. Like Rousseau and Goethe, he believes in a "natural," inborn human virtuousness, a plant which—though it needs proper care—develops in its own direction and under its own power.⁴⁰ This quasi-biological

39. See Harris, p. 115. For a more positive view see Plant, p. 52ff., and for an utterly belligerent view, see Lukacs, *The Young Hegel*, "Hegel's Early Republican Phase (Berne 1793–96)," pp. 1–89, in which he rejects the standard interpretation of Hegel's "theological period" as "a reactionary legend" (p. 3ff.).

40. In Harris, p. 497–98.

thinking extends throughout Hegel's works, and like Fichte, the bold abstraction which he sometimes calls "life" will always be his ultimate criterion—for philosophy, for religion, for morality:

Subjective religion is alive; objective religion is an abstraction. . . . the former is the living book of nature, plants, insects, birds and beasts, as they live with one another and upon one another, each living its life and getting its pleasure . . . the latter is the cabinet of the naturalist wherein the insects have been killed, the plants dried, the animals stuffed or pickled, all organized for one single end where nature had interlaced an infinite variety of ends in a friendly bond.⁴¹

This is a particularly striking passage. We shall see another variation in the opening paragraph of the *Phenomenology*. It is a warning against any philosophy, theology, ethics, or metaphysics which puts first priority in its own simplistic ideas rather than in the diversity and fluidity of *life*.⁴² An acceptable religion will be one that is "alive." And so too a successful philosophy. What the younger Hegel would demand of his own *Phenomenology*, therefore, would be not so much clarity or cleverness, not so much the truth of its conclusions or the profundity of its pronouncements, but its sense of vitality, a "bacchanalian revel."⁴³ The purpose of philosophy is celebration as well as understanding, to express and augment the life of the human spirit, not to analyze and process it. With this in mind, the obscurities and confusions of Hegel's work should not annoy us. The point is to show that life is obscure and confused too.

In the following year, 1794, Hegel moved to Switzerland. His first known writing there, which survives only as a fragment,⁴⁴ raises the question which is evaded throughout the Tübingen essay—whether Christianity (*not* Christian theology) might be a candidate for a renewed sense of "subjectivity." Hegel's answer is that Christianity is "an Oriental religion, not grown on our soil, and cannot be assimilated therewith."⁴⁵ Christianity is not for Hegel the promise of things to come, but a tradition to be overcome. In this too, like Voltaire, he is part and parcel of the pagan enlightenment. But he is also part of the German Protestant tradition, after Luther, Kant, and his own upbringing, and this means that Christianity, however foreign and unpromising, cannot be ignored. Its language and its images, therefore, will pervade the whole of Hegel's philosophy.

41. In Harris, p. 484.

42. The comparison there (§ 1) is with anatomy; the warning is that isolated parts (ideas) do not yet add up to a living whole (philosophy). Cf. *Phenomenology*, I.

43. *Phenomenology*, 47.

44. Harris, p. 509.

45. *Ibid.*

The "Positivity" of Christian Religion

In his early writings, Hegel used the word "natural," an Enlightenment word, to refer to moral sentiments and, with regard to religion, that form of religion that supported and nourished those sentiments. Christian theology certainly failed to do so. The question was—Could Christianity itself serve that function?

By 1795, now at a remove from his student gripes, Hegel came to see a deeper objection to Christian theology than its "objectivity." It was authoritarian. It failed to meet the ultimate standard of Enlightenment—*autonomy*, the confidence that every person had the ability and the *right* to make up his or her own mind. Christianity not only failed to appeal to our "natural" sentiments but it positively thwarted them. This authoritarianism Hegel calls "positivity," and religions that impose such principles he called "positive." The climate of Berne, his temporary home in Switzerland after he graduated from the *Stift*, was itself highly positive (which Hegel complained about bitterly in his letters to his friends.) His essays of the time, accordingly, were mainly attacks on authoritarianism (though not necessarily on authority as such), and a diagnosis of Christianity as itself intrinsically authoritarian or positive. The contrast, again, would be the religion of ancient Greece, but, if we may be permitted a slight pun, the message of Hegel's essay, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," was almost wholly negative.

The Positivity-essay was written in 1795, and there are good indications that Hegel intended to publish it as his first book. In 1800, he turned to it again and began to rewrite. The most significant change is one of direction—instead of diagnosing what went wrong with Christianity, he begins to suggest what was *necessary* for its development. But it is clear that Hegel's ambitions reach far beyond those of the scholarly philologist and biblical analyst. It is the human Spirit itself that he wants to get his conceptual hands on.

Just before he wrote the Positivity-essay, Hegel attempted a shorter work, even more pretentious, if not ludicrous, in its ambitions. It was called the "Life of Jesus," and it was, among other things, a secularization of the Christ story; God is "pure reason," Mary is a naturally pregnant woman and Jesus is a mere mortal who actually dies on a cross.⁴⁶ Such attempts are commonplace now; in fact, they were a literary platitude by the middle of the 19th century.⁴⁷ But in Hegel's

46. See Harris, pp. 333ff, 194–207.

47. Cf. Nietzsche's early attacks, e.g. in *David Strauss: Confessor and Writer* (1873), the first of four "Untimely Meditations."

time, such attempts were blasphemy. Hegel's intention was nothing less than to recast Christianity as a wholly secular religion, in which Jesus was no more than a teacher of morality—specifically the moral philosophy of Kant—and the religion itself nothing other than an appeal to our own autonomous sense of virtue—an announcement of the categorical imperative. If Christianity were to be made acceptable and shown to be more than exotic imposition on the minds of the West, then it would have to be shown to be “natural.” The “Life of Jesus” was a clumsy attempt to do just that.⁴⁸

In the short time since he had written the Tübingen essay, Hegel had finally read Kant, not as a student, but as an enthusiast. Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* had been published as a book in 1793, and of course Hegel knew his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) from school. In the *Stift*, Hegel had been taught a poor imitation of its leading ideas, but now, with a new and more personal insight, Hegel was inspired to take Kant's “critique” of Christianity as a “rational” (i.e. “natural”) religion in an entirely new direction.⁴⁹ On the one hand, he wholly accepted Kant's essential thesis—that the sole justification for religion was its effects on human virtue. But on the other hand, he rejected Kant's defense of Christianity as the religion that best served morality. Too much of Christianity was positive. Too much depended on authority and revelation rather than on the autonomous reason of the individual. Too much depended on divine sanction rather than on the intrinsic importance of virtue for its own sake.

The “Life of Jesus” is a farce, but it is a farce with a powerful philosophical ambition behind it. Having outgrown his rebellious reactions against the theology he learned at school, Hegel now faces the monumental task of sorting out what he accepts, and what he does not, of the religion he has been taught all his life. What he wants to show is that he accepts Christianity insofar as it fits his Enlightenment ideal of moral autonomy and its appeal to “natural” feelings. But no sooner does he attempt to show this than a crushing realization reveals his first attempt as a farce. The obvious truth of the matter is that Jesus was no Kant, that the moral of Jesus' Sermon was not the categorical imperative, that Christianity and Enlightenment (as the Romantics were to argue) were more opposed than identical, and that religion has had little to do with individual autonomy.

48. Harris, p. 195ff, provides a more sympathetic reading of this essay, as an attempt to re-establish Jesus' Christianity on a rational (i.e. Kantian) foundation, which is in no way a “falsification of history,” but is rather “closer to the literal language of what Jesus said than the language ascribed to him in the Gospel” (196).

49. Following H.E.G. Paulus and Immanuel Dietz, whom Hegel had studied at the *Stift*. See Harris, pp. 57–153, and Dieter Henrich *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt, 1971), pp. 41–72. See also Schmidt, p. 127f.

Hegel's Positivity-essay is his attempt to come to grips with the realization that Christianity is, from beginning to end, "a religion grounded in authority," an anti-humanist metaphysics "which puts man's worth at nothing at all."⁵⁰ The antitheses he now recognizes go deeper than the simple "subjective-objective" distinction of his first essay; there are our "natural" inclinations and reason on the one side, and on the other the tyrannical authorities of institutionalized religion which do not so much neglect our feelings as *manipulate* them. The Sermon on the Mount was not just the Kantian appeal "Follow your reason," but a terrifying set of threats which said, "Follow me or be damned." This was the foundation of Christianity—unnatural, authoritarian, antithetical to real human concerns and interests. Even Jesus, who had been so protected in the "Life of Jesus" essay, could be seen to be authoritarian, although Hegel excuses this as a pedagogical necessity.⁵¹ The problem of the Positivity-essay, then, was to trace the origins of this most "unnatural" religion, back through the church to the disciples and the first days of Jesus' teaching. What were the circumstances that forced this teacher of morality to initiate a religion so antithetical to human autonomy?

The Kantian premise of the Positivity-essay could not be more explicitly stated; "The aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is human morality."⁵² The question then becomes, to what extent the doctrines and practices of Christianity—whether in belief or action—"have their worth and their sanctity according to that aim."⁵³ Right from the beginning, Hegel insists that he is not willing to begin his investigation with "a confession of faith." He will keep his own individual convictions out of the discussion—a revealing strategy, considering the vindictiveness with which he then proceeds to treat some of the Judeo-Christian tradition's most central virtues.

The main theme of the essay begins with a discussion of the Jews in ancient times. The treatment is harsh:

The Jews were a people who derived their legislation from the supreme wisdom on high and whose spirit was now (in the time of Jesus) overwhelmed by a burden of statutory commands which pedantically prescribed a rule for every casual action of daily life and gave the whole people the look of a monastic order. As a result of this system the holiest of things, namely, the service of God and vir-

50. *Early Theo. Mss.* p. 72f.

51. Hegel's view is ambivalent: He [Jesus] undertook to raise religion and virtue to morality and to restore to morality the *freedom* which is its essence" (69). And in the revised version: "It is very natural to expect that, once the new teaching of Jesus had been adopted by Jewish intellects, it must have *turned into* something positive, however free it was in itself despite its polemical form" etc. (181).

52. *Ibid.* 68.

53. *Ibid.*

tue, was ordered and compressed in dead formulas, and nothing save pride in this slavish obedience to laws not laid down by themselves was left to the Jewish spirit, which was already deeply mortified and embittered by the subjection of the state to a foreign power.⁵⁴

Judaism, by its very essence, was a positive religion, based on laws “not laid down by” the Jews themselves. This is the model then, which Christianity had to follow, and the positivity of Christianity, according to Hegel, must be traced back to the environment within which Jesus sought his first followers. The argument, simply stated, was that Jesus, in addressing the Jews, had no choice but to state his case in a positive way, “with no immediate connection with morality.” His commands derive their validity simply “from the fact that Jesus commanded them.”⁵⁵ His aim was to show how Christianity became positive virtually from its inception, yet protect Jesus himself from that charge by interpreting his demagogical authoritarianism as a matter of rhetoric rather than content. The content of Jesus’ teachings, however hidden in such talk of the Messiah and miracles, consisted of moral laws based on natural human sentiments. So even if he *said*, “I am the way,” Jesus intended to instill a sense of virtue in his followers which was wholly “natural.”

It was a tenuous argument. It began by being knowingly unfair to Judaism, which was, as much as any religion, self-consciously moral. (Hegel knew this from Mendelssohn.) It continued the dubious theme of the “Life of Jesus” essay, that Jesus was a Kantian in disguise as the Messiah, even if the identity was no longer presented as a farce. And, perhaps most seriously, Hegel “saves” Jesus from the charge of positivity only by rendering him wholly duplicitous and manipulative, even if for a good cause.

Hegel’s ambivalence toward Jesus and Christianity will remain with him throughout his career. His attitude toward the Jews, however, deserves some brief comment at least in passing, since his often harsh indictments have frequently been interpreted as sowing the seeds of anti-Semitism that would have such devastating consequences in this century. First, it might be pointed out that the period in which Hegel is writing these essays was an exceptionally tolerant period in German-Jewish history, for the French Enlightenment ideals, which included religious tolerance, had their effect in Germany as well as in France. Hegel was wholly sympathetic to this, and his analysis is more critical than vindictive or an expression of anti-Semitism. In fact, Hegel’s early Enlightenment heroes in Germany were Jewish thinkers, especially

54. Ibid. 68–69.

55. Ibid. 72.

Mendelssohn, who denied that Judaism was a positive religion based on authority and not autonomous, since the Hebraic laws, whether positive or not, were *also* expressions of essential human needs and sentiments.⁵⁶ Second, it should be pointed out that, during the “reaction” of the 1820s, Hegel placed himself at some risk, which he was not prone to do, on behalf of Jewish rights in a period that was becoming virulently anti-Semitic. Third, if his remarks are harsh, in general they were not wholly different from the kinds of complaints often leveled by the Jews themselves and the kinds of disputes within the various sects of Judaism: how literally to interpret the laws, how secular, how assimilative, how democratic, and how authoritative. And finally, Hegel’s treatment of the early Christians, including the founders of the church, is no more sympathetic than his treatment of the Jews. It is the whole tradition he rejects. Revealingly, what he says of the Jews (e.g. their self-contempt because of their political impotence) was an accurate depiction of German self-identity too, a point he makes clear in Part II of the essay and in a draft of the essay on the German constitution of the same year.⁵⁷

What Hegel is doing here is playing a double game; on the one hand, he is attacking Jesus himself and the very roots of Christian theology; but at the same time, he is excusing Jesus by shifting the blame to the Gospels, and his audience, who were simply not “developed” enough to understand the dictates of rational reason, so needed miracles and revelations instead. (The ploy comes straight out of Kant, who says that Christianity, “the religion of reason, adapted itself to the prejudices of those times.”) But this idea of “the Truth” being presented and taken up in some sort of primitive and inadequate form is the idea that will also form the core of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, whose central thesis is that the Truth (a quasi-mystical proposition, already defended by Schelling as “the Absolute”) is present in all “forms of consciousness” but in most of them distortedly and inadequately. Here, the Truth is at one and the same time ascribed to and denied to Jesus who, after all, “could not contradict his friends.” Hegel’s clear prose allows his own ambivalence to be clear too—unlike the later writing in the *Phenomenology*. Is Hegel attacking Jesus as he tries to protect him? Or he is praising Jesus even while undermining him?

There can be no doubt that Jesus is accused of being *personally* au-

56. Harris, p. 284n.

57. Ibid. 145ff. “The German Constitution,” finished (but not completed) in 1802. Hegel simply stopped working on it: Napoleon had arrived. See Carl Friedrich, ed. *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: Knopf, 1953), pp. 527–39; and see Harris, p. 435ff., esp. 464ff. and 476.

thoritarian. In one particularly sarcastic section, Hegel contrasts Jesus with Socrates, much to the disadvantage of the former. Socrates, Hegel comments with a sneer, had no reason to form a closed cult:

Jesus had thought fit to fix the number of his trusted friends at twelve, and to these as his messengers and successors he gave a wide authority after his resurrection. Every man has full authority for the diffusion of virtue, and there is no sacrosanct number of the men who feel called to undertake the founding of God's kingdom on earth. Socrates did not have seven disciples, or three times three; any friend of virtue was welcome.⁵⁸

Socrates, unlike Jesus, encouraged individual thinking in his friends, and embraced "the democratic spirit," according to Hegel, and in tune with the Enlightenment thinking of Hegel's time. (In fact, one of the reasons for Socrates' condemnation by the Athenians was his *opposition* to democracy.)⁵⁹

From their youth up, the friends of Socrates had developed their powers in many directions. They had absorbed that democratic spirit which gives an individual a greater measure of independence and makes it impossible for any tolerably good head to depend wholly and absolutely on one person. In their state it was worth while to have a political interest, and an interest of that kind can never be sacrificed. Most of them had already been pupils of other philosophers and other teachers. They loved Socrates because of his virtue and his philosophy, not virtue and his philosophy because of him. Just as Socrates had fought for his native land, had fulfilled all the duties of a free citizen as a brave soldier in war and a just judge in peace, so too all his friends were something more than mere inactive philosophers, than mere pupils of Socrates. Moreover, they had the capacity to work in their own heads on what they had learned and go give it the stamp of their own originality. Many of them founded schools of their own; in their own right they were men as great as Socrates.⁶⁰

As a strategy to bring out the "positivity" of Jesus' teachings, the contrast with Socrates is ideal. But what Hegel has in mind is something more than Socrates' appeal as a supposedly free-thinker; it is also his intense loyalty to the state, his unwavering sense of citizenship to the society that condemns him.⁶¹ Jesus, of course, was condemned

58. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 82.

59. See I.F. Stone's trans-temporal sleuthing in the *New York Times Magazine*, January 1978.

60. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 82.

61. Thus in the same year, 1795, Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) submitted to the Paris Salon his heroic portrait of "The Death of Socrates" (now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York). In France, just before the revolution, the depiction of Socrates' self-sacrifice offered the public an unambiguous message. The picture was worth at least a hundred words or so, the words being the final arguments in the *Crito*:

Socrates: Suppose that while we were preparing to run away from here, the Laws of Athens were to confront us and ask: 'do you imagine that a city can continue to exist and not be turned

too, but as an outsider. Socrates was the teacher *within* a republic, who appealed to the wisdom he *shared* with his countrymen. In Rousseau's terms, he was a *citizen*, not merely a man. Jesus spoke for "humanity," died "for humanity," but he appealed to those who had no home, who had no loyalties save to him. Later on in his career, Hegel will reconsider the significance of dying "for all mankind"; but at this point in his career, he sees primarily the fact of Jesus' alienation, and Christianity as an ideology for the alienated.

It is important to appreciate just how social Hegel's whole perspective is. Kant had subsumed all religious questions under the rubric of morality; for Hegel they are rather consumed by concerns about community. His ideal is the Greek *polis* or city-state, in which religion is essentially a cohesive force within the community, rather than a subversive force threatening the state. Indeed, Hegel's whole program—in so far as he may be said to have one—is to clarify for himself the relationship between three very different paradigms in his life and contemporary culture,—the *avant-garde* moral philosophy of Kant, the historical teachings of Jesus, and the nostalgic sense he shared with Hölderlin and most German intellectuals for the harmonious community of the ancient Greek city-state. In the Positivity-essay, he is still struggling to hold them all together, but he is already having his doubts. Thus his ambivalence toward Jesus, and his later ambivalence toward Kant. But even in the *Phenomenology*, eleven years later, it will be Hegel's sense of admiration for the *polis* that lies at the heart of his views about "spirit" and religion in general.

And yet, the underlying contrast of the entire essay, including the revised version of four years later, is this unflattering portrait of an impersonal, alienated, authoritarian cult of Christianity versus the "sound intuition" and "pure morality" of the Greeks. How can we worship Jesus when it is Socrates who emerges so much more admirable? And here again Hegel shifts the blame, not this time to Jesus' Jewish audience, but to the church;

it ignores the rights pertaining to every faculty of the human mind, in particular to the chief of them, *reason*. Once the church's system ignores reason, it can be nothing save a system that despises man.⁶²

But the church, according to Hegel, is an institution that is primarily *political*, not religious, and its authoritarianism is bound to increase as it increases its base of power;

upside-down if the legal judgments which are pronounced in it have no force and are nullified and destroyed by private citizens? . . . Have you not undertaken, in deed if not in word, to live your life as a citizen in obedience to us? What are we to say to that Crito?

Crito: We cannot help it, Socrates.

Socrates: Then give it up Crito . . . God points the way.

62. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 143.

The farther it spread from its source, the more it retained in turn merely the rules and laws of its founder; and these now became for its adherents not laws that issued from freedom but ecclesiastical statutes all over again.⁶³

Religion necessarily begins in *sects* or *cults*, Hegel tells us, small, intimate groups of like-minded peers for whom religion is first of all a bond of friendship, but as they grow, these become increasingly defensive and, finally, *offensive*, as intimacy and personal bonds give way to abstract rules and impersonal rituals. And what begins as interpersonal love and respect turns into a mere abstraction. "Equality," for example, "was a principle with the early Christians . . . men were to be valued not by honors or dignity, not by talents or other brilliant qualities, but by the strength of their faith. This theory to be sure, has been retained in all its comprehensiveness, but with the clever addition that it is in the eyes of Heaven that all men are equal in this sense. For this reason it [the theory of equality] receives no further notice in this earthly life"⁶⁴.

This kind of political sarcasm, attacking religion for its failures in the social realm, is the key to the essay. But it must be noted that Hegel is thereby reconsidering one of the central tenets of the Enlightenment—the total separation of church and state. This is tantamount to depriving a society of its moral authority, he argues, as well as the substance of its spiritual (i.e. communal) life. One might well speculate on how Hegel would respond to our own contemporary "re-birth" of Christian cultism, for he too was torn between the Enlightenment sense of toleration for different religious beliefs (like Rousseau, for example, who thought only that *some* such belief should be mandatory) and his sense that the sole function of religion was to provide the unifying "spiritual" force to community. But the political hegemony of one particular religion—the Lutheran church in Germany, for instance—seemed to him to signify the *failure* of religious faith and a retreat into pure positivity.⁶⁵

Hegel is not "anti-Christian"; he is ambivalent. The problem that plagues him is the problem that will provide the impetus to his entire philosophy—How does one create a meaningful sense of existence in this modern society of large nation-states? What is the source of legitimacy of authority in general and how is it to be reconciled with the moral autonomy of the individual? The answer, defended in several essays by Kant, then Fichte, then Schelling, and finally Hegel (but not

63. Ibid. 142.

64. Ibid. 88–89.

65. Hegel even makes the Nietzschean suggestion that the urge to expand is in fact an expression of resentment against those who can live without positive religion.

until 1802–3) was “natural” law, a sense of authority that was wholly based on reason and interests which were to be found in each and every individual. But to see how this term should be interpreted inevitably turned into a re-examination of Christianity (which claimed to provide such a law), morality (which also claimed to have discovered such a law), the ancient Greeks (who seemed to have had that sense of unity without the need of a law), and, ultimately, the whole history of civilization, in order to see, once and for all, what human life was really about.

What role in this over-all picture of human life should Christianity play? Was it the final truth of practical reason, as Hegel had been taught in the *Stift*? Was it merely a stage in the evolution of a more secular and sensible world order, as Lessing had argued in his “Education of Mankind”?⁶⁶ Was it the political province of a particularly powerful family of self-indulgent, hypocritical institutions: the church (in its various denominations) as some of the French *philosophes* had charged? Or could it be that Christianity was, after all, the “true” religion but, despite this, only a hint toward the truth it really contained? Thus anticipating the whole religious image of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes,

Jesus may have been conscious of a tie between himself and God, or he may merely have held that the law hidden in our hearts was an immediate revelation of God or a hidden spark . . .⁶⁷

If the second suggestion were true, then Jesus may have seen himself as more of a symbol than the actual Godhead, the lesson, only to be understood years later (in 1807, to be precise) that God is not only “in” us all; *we all are God*. Such is the “Spirit” of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.

If Hegel shared Kant’s concern with *humanity*, however, he was even

66. In 1787 Hegel read Lessing’s “Education of Mankind” in high school (see Harris, p. 99n.). He re-read it in 1793 and it has been argued that it deeply influenced his over-all project (Kaufmann, p. 67f.). Lessing argued that history might be understood in three stages: the first the world of the Old Testament, the second the world of the New Testament, the third, just beginning, a world of universal love and mutual respect and tolerance. It is not difficult to see in this model (which Lessing found in medieval texts too) the prototype of Hegel’s own “dialectic” (Kaufmann) and also the Enlightenment direction of Hegel’s own thinking, in which the spiritual community once only possible in small sects and cults would now become available to the whole of humanity. But Lessing’s work was probably not as decisive an inspiration to the dialectic as James Steuart’s *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* [new ed., Boyd, ed. (Edinburgh, 1966)], which Hegel read (and according to one of his biographers wrote a commentary about) in 1799. Raymond Plant, for example, suggests that it is here that “the notion of a rationally discernible development in history” enters Hegel’s thought (*Hegel*, p. 57). But then, when Hegel “discovered” history and dialectic depends largely on what is meant by “history” and “dialectic”; Harris points out Hegel’s love of history even in high school; Hegel rejects “historicism” in philosophy even in 1801 (in the *Differenz-essay*) and the role of “history” in the *Phenomenology* is, to say the least, problematic.

67. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 76.

more concerned, as we have indicated, with Germany. What effects has Christianity had in his own country? And it is here that his sense of the peculiar mythology and *Volk*-religion of Germany, which he had learned from Herder, becomes extremely important. "Every nation," he writes, "has its own imagery, its gods, angels, devils or saints who live on in the nation's traditions, whose stories and deeds the nurse tells to her charges and so wins them over by impressing their imagination."⁶⁸ For the ancient Germans, the imagery was Valhalla (the great hall of Odin, the god of war, poetry, knowledge, and wisdom, where the souls of heroes who had died in battle gathered). But,

Christianity has emptied Valhalla, felled the sacred groves, extirpated the national imagery as a shameful superstition, as a devilish poison, and given us instead the imagery of a nation whose climate, laws, culture and interests are foreign to us and whose history has no connection with our own.⁶⁹

Hegel's lament repeats his complaint from Berne, that Christianity is a "foreign" temperament, and the result is a tragic lack of pride and sense of belonging for the German *Volk*. Consequently, they had been caught up in wars as pawns, not fighting *for* anything in particular, but just following orders.⁷⁰ The contrast, again, is with Athens, where every citizen and even every visitor would know the whole history, culture, every law, and the pride of Athens, just by being there. The contrast too might be made with Germany in our own times, and what seems to us its fanaticism for political images and absolutes;

... without any religious imagery which is home-grown or linked with our history, we are without any political imagery whatever; all that we have is the remains of an imagery of our own, lurking amid the common people under the name of superstition.⁷¹

Thus we can see in this essay Hegel's ambivalence too about the provincial *Volk*-superstitions of Germany *vis-à-vis* the more abstract universal ideals of the Enlightenment. He is drawn to Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* poets (from whom these lines are partly borrowed) as well as Kant, Lessing, and the Enlightenment. He even rejects "the Greek mythology of more educated people,"⁷² for it too is not "home-grown" and no longer plausibly "universal."

And so, in this very negative essay, Hegel pushes aside the traditional answers; the worlds of the Old and the New Testament are

68. Ibid. 145.

69. Ibid. 146.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid. 147.

72. Ibid. 148.

dead and gone; the wisdom of the *Volk* is too naïve to be the whole truth; Greek mythology is a handy contrast but one cannot “go back” as Rousseau too had warned; Germany had lost its imagery and nothing seemed ready to replace it; the world had lost its sense of community, and Christianity was not the religion which could provide it. In fact, Hegel here raises the question that later was so to vex Nietzsche (and had already been raised by Rousseau), namely—How was it possible for Christianity, a “slave religion,” to conquer homegrown pagan religions socially so superior? The answer he gives is confined to Rome, to the increased size and secularism in which people lost their sense of participation, turned instead to an empty individualism wholly concerned with personal property and material welfare, in which the life of the individual took on absolute importance. (The same argument reappears twice in the *Phenomenology*, in chapter 6.) The undoing of this view, however, was *death*; for every individual:

Death, the phenomenon which demolishes the whole structure of his purposes and the activity of his entire life, must have come to be something terrifying, since nothing survived him. But the republican's whole soul was in the republic; the republic survived him, and there hovered before his mind the thought of its immortality.⁷³

And in the face of this terrifying, total end, Christianity looked most attractive. But notice that “immortality” here refers not to the survival of the soul after death, but the continuation of the *meaning* of one's life in the community.⁷⁴ And this is what Hegel wants to reformulate, this sense of meaning, against the individualism of his own time, in which life is something more than personal well-being, a notion which had become extremely tenuous in the shadow of the violence of the French Revolution.

How could this be done? Not by simply rejecting Christianity, not by simply reinterpreting Jesus as a proto-Kantian, and not by blindly idolizing the Greek *polis*, so different not only in size but in form from the modern nation-state. But this is the task of Hegel's philosophy, and, in particular, the vital task (as opposed to the merely more academic problems) which drives us through the *Phenomenology*.

73. Ibid. 157.

74. Robert J. Lifton provides us with a modern example of the same sense of “immortality” in his report on Hiroshima and its survivors; they describe their despair not in terms of their own personal deaths but in terms of the realization that their whole world, family, friends, and community seemed to be ending too. It is a timely reminder today.

Images from Hölderlin

For the pensive God
 Hates
 Untimely Growth
 —Hölderlin

After school at Tübingen, the three friends, Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, kept up their correspondence and their mutual affections. It was Hölderlin who secured Hegel jobs as a tutor in the lean years after graduation; it was eventually Schelling who arranged his first academic job and launched him on his philosophical career. But it was also by way of Hölderlin and Schelling that we must understand the most immediate influences on Hegel's somewhat late intellectual development. He read what they read; he picked up ideas and images they had been working with and publishing for years. And it was Hölderlin, beyond question, who was pivotal in the emergence of Hegel's most dramatic images, both while they were students in Tübingen until 1793, and afterward.⁷⁵

In 1795 Hölderlin moved to Frankfurt to become the tutor to the children of a wealthy banker, Gontard. Hegel would join him there a year or so later. In the meantime, Hölderlin became increasingly intimate with Gontard's young wife, Susette and, whether consummated or not, the relationship came to represent for Hölderlin the most profound experience imaginable. He came to call her "Diotima," and she inspired some of his most lyrical poems, filled (*à la* Klopstock) with sacred and religious images turned secular.⁷⁶ Philosophically, she presented him with an experience which came to represent to him the ultimate realization of the cosmic spirit, in a word, an enthusiastic *harmony* in which all of life comes together in a single seemingly eternal moment. The experience is familiar to all of us, of course, but we are not poets, at least, not with Hölderlin's extraordinary gifts and extravagant imagination. For him, it summarized all that he had been searching for in his reading, his thinking, his discourse with his friends,

75. Schelling was five years younger than Hegel and Hölderlin and impressionable; Hegel, the "old man" of the group, was distinctively less creative and, at this point in his life, was still struggling for a philosophical identity. Hölderlin had already "found himself" as a poet before leaving school, and by the mid-1790s he was writing his best works.

76. Such now familiar devices as calling a flesh and blood woman "angel" were unthinkable before 1750 or so. Klopstock, the most powerful of the *Sturm und Drang* poets, introduced this device into his own passionate poetry, and it was particularly suited to the romantic images Hölderlin employed to express his love for Susette-Diotima.

and his prior poetry, couched in ancient images and carried on classical meters.⁷⁷ Now the experience he imagined to be the common lot of the Greeks had become his too, and his poetry broke through the bounds of Greek meter and his thoughts—though couched in language of the divine—became increasingly secular, concerned with nature and the tangible. The cosmic spirit had now come down to earth, and found itself embodied in a single, illicit liaison whose end was all too unavoidable. Truth had become—a woman.

The image of Truth as a woman, and the relationship with Truth as a quasi-sexual one, seems ludicrous to Anglo-American ears, for whom “true” is a condition of cold propositions. But it is an image that thoroughly permeates ancient Greek philosophy, and German philosophy too, notably in Hegel’s concept of “com-prehension.” Plato’s view of the will to truth is often expressed in terms that suggest lust, and the German feminine noun, *die Wahrheit*, becomes easily mixed with such less than poetic images as “grasping”.⁷⁸ Thus Hegel and Goethe often switch at a crucial moment to the neuter *das Wahre*, just when that sexual imagery becomes a bit too blatant. Nietzsche, who was profoundly impressed by Hölderlin, would later preface one of his books (*Beyond Good and Evil*) with the speculation, “Suppose Truth is a woman. Is it not possible that philosophers have not known how to handle her?” The imagery is obviously well entrenched even in the German language itself. This is an important metaphorical feature of our discussion, therefore, which should not be lost in the too ponderous prose in which such images are often buried. But in Hölderlin, who had poetic license in such matters, the image is bold and forthright.

Through their correspondence, Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling began to evolve a religion based on the worship of the ancient gods Zeus and Ceres (the goddess of Earth), with a mystical sense of the substance that permeated and held the universe together—the *Ether*. This is a theory thoroughly discredited by modern physics, which no longer abhors a vacuum, but the idea of a universal substance then seemed inescapable. Along with the spiritualization of nature in general, the Ether had to be spiritualized as well. The clumsy attempt at forming a new religion was exactly right for Hegel’s own clumsy at-

77. In 1796, this would have been a virtually obligatory device, for both Goethe and Schiller were at the height of their own classical phase, and it was their various journals (that year, the *Neue Thalia*) to which Hölderlin was submitting his poems.

78. The thesis about Plato’s sexual imagery I owe to Paul Woodruff; for long discussions about Hölderlin’s poetry and specifically the German feminine imagery surrounding *die Wahrheit*, I owe much (and more) to Christopher Middleton.

tempt to criticize Christianity and suggest some version of Greek folk-religion that might take its place. In a much more sophisticated mode, it also provided the romantic outlet for Schelling's now very Fichtean philosophy, and the concept of the World-Soul which he was developing for his philosophy of nature.⁷⁹ And it was spectacularly suited to Hölderlin's nostalgic poetic genius and his desire to revitalize our concept of Nature, reintegrate Humanity and Nature, and interpret the whole under the image of a unified world-spirit, struggling for its⁸⁰ own self-realization.

Hegel arrived in Frankfurt late in 1796 to begin tutoring in January. Hölderlin and Schelling had lost contact, but both were in touch with Hegel. Hölderlin, meanwhile, had been carrying on a correspondence with Schiller, but a one-sided correspondence for Schiller was slow in answering and sometimes ignored him. As something of an overseer of the poetry of Germany in those days, Schiller (with Goethe) had a disastrous effect on Hölderlin. His rejections were like wounds; his neglect left Hölderlin brooding and morbid. And at the end of the summer of 1798, Hölderlin was expelled from the Gontard household. He did not move far—only to Homburg, but the word that permeates his letters to Susette (and hers to him) is "Pain".⁸¹ Meanwhile, Hegel could not have been much by way of emotional support, for he was going through his own inner crisis. H.S. Harris quotes Hegel's sister Christine describing him as "very withdrawn"⁸² and surmises that Hegel's depression continued for some time after his move to Frankfurt. It has been suggested, for example, by Lukacs and T.M. Knox, that this brought about a "revolution in Hegel's thinking," which Harris denies.⁸³ But this much is clear—that Hölderlin's influence on Hegel was never greater. Harris suggests that Hegel's goal was perfectly clear, an "inward certainty," but that he did not know how to get there.⁸⁴ But it should be noted that Hölderlin was also taking a turn back toward Christianity, and Hegel's apparent change of tone from utter antagonism to appreciation for Christianity can be understood largely in terms of Hölderlin.

79. Schelling's book, *The World-Soul as a Hypothesis for Physics* was published in 1796.

80. One might think "her" or perhaps "him," but Hölderlin's *Geist* seems more idealized and less sexually specific. Given the joint emphasis on Ceres and Zeus, a hermaphroditic image is more plausible. He quotes Sophocles; "Dost thou not see above and around us the immeasurable Ether which embraces the earth with cool arms? That is God." I take this to mean that *Spirit* is the unity of the whole, not its parts.

81. "Only by my pain am I aware that I am still alive" and "How I love this pain: if it should leave me and I should again be numb, how I seek with longing to feel it again."

82. Harris, p. 258.

83. Ibid. 259.

84. Ibid. 266.

Just before coming to Frankfurt, Hegel wrote a poem, *Eleusis*, under Hölderlin's influence, and the poem is addressed to Hölderlin. It is distinctly unphilosophical, even mystical, and it is an expression of the half-baked neo-classical religion the friends were in the process of inventing. He says "It is the Ether of my homeland too/ the solemnity, the splendor that surrounds you." It is the spirit of the Greek Goddess, the great Earth-Mother who is the poem's subject, and God is "the human absolute of the free heart." When they were together in Frankfurt, there can be no doubt about the richness of the exchange between them, which seemed to pull Hegel out of his depression and get him working again. But Hölderlin seems not to have benefited so much from Hegel's presence, despite his first expectations, and as Hegel regained his confidence, Hölderlin was already beginning to become undone.⁸⁵

It is hard to say, in the absence of more evidence, which of the friends suggested which of the images, - but the bets seem heavily to favor Hölderlin.⁸⁶ In particular, the image of the cosmic spirit, effusing itself throughout nature and history, seemed to come from him, to be played out in philosophy first by Schelling, a decade later by Hegel. The vital image of the ancient Greeks, which had interested Hegel even in high school, probably became a passion only with Hölderlin, and it is not coincidental that Hegel's enthusiasm for the Greeks begins to wane just when he and Hölderlin are separated.

It is probably Hölderlin, the only true "romantic" (in the ordinary sense) of the three, who introduces the idea of Love as the ultimate unifying principle, an image that dominates Hegel's thinking at this time and becomes the centerpiece of his next essay, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," which he started in 1798, just when Hölderlin begins to move back to Christianity.⁸⁷ It is Hölderlin who uses the all-important phrase "the fluidity of the concept," and his own

85. Like the flat-footed Goose, I am standing in a modern puddle,
Impatiently flapping my wings towards the sky of ancient Greece.

Oh soul of Greece, I must go down.

I must seek you in the realms of the dead. (*Hyperion*).

86. Harris provides an extensive account of Hegel's own work during this period, and discusses at length Hegel's growing friendship with Hölderlin's friend Sinclair, whom I have omitted for simplicity's sake (pp. 258–310). Also J. Hoffmeister, *Hölderlin und Hegel in Frankfurt* (Tübingen, 1931).

87. See Harris for an extended discussion of the formulation of this thesis (pp. 310ff., esp. 316–17, 322–46). We will discuss the essay itself in the following section. It is worth noting that Hölderlin's most ambitious work of this period was a long poem *Empedokles*, after the philosopher of *Love and Strife* who argued that the unity of the various processes and separate things in the world is Love, which is inevitably torn apart by conflict, only to be joined once again and severed once again, and so on. (Empedokles lived from about 484 to 424 B.C.).

poetry is still a lesson to radical poets wanting to see how far a language and its images can be stretched in the search for some cosmic inspiration.⁸⁸ It is Hölderlin who employs the *Bildung* imagery, which he picked up more or less directly from Goethe and Schiller, and Hölderlin who urges the “synthesis of Nature and Spirit,” which becomes the main theme of Schelling’s philosophy and the at least nominal goal of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and later “system.” The word “Absolute” appears in Hölderlin first too, although—again—it was borrowed from immediate influences, notably Fichte.

None of this is to subtract from Hegel’s own achievements in the least; he prided himself on his synthetic abilities, although one would have liked to have seen an occasional reference or at least a gesture of concern for Hölderlin in the *Phenomenology*. By the time Hegel had begun to write his great book, in fact, Hölderlin was hopelessly insane; a single note might have given us a very different picture of Hegel’s personality, as a concerned friend rather than an ambitious and impersonal philosophical system-builder. But in 1797–98, the friendship obviously came first, and as a step in Hegel’s development, Hölderlin deserves a very special place. The divinity of Man was his idea, and unlike Hegel, he suffered mightily for it—

I loved my heroes as a moth loves the light. I sought their dangerous proximity and fled it and sought it again. . . . I became what I saw, and what I saw was God-like.—*Hyperion*

Love and the Spirit of Christianity

To act in the spirit of the laws could not have meant for him “to act out of respect for duty and to contradict inclinations” . . . in love all thought of duties vanishes. —“The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate”

In 1799, Hegel wrote another “theological” essay (no longer “anti-theological”) entitled “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate.” Wilhelm Dilthey and later Richard Kroner called it “the most beautiful thing Hegel ever wrote.” That is a matter of opinion, of course, but what almost every reader of Hegel’s early works would agree about is

88. The lesson about stretching concepts, of course, is taken to heart by Hegel in his own “speculative” language (see the following sections and Chapter 4a), though probably furthering his obscurity rather than his insights. Heidegger has written a long study of Hölderlin (*Hölderlin and the Spirit of Poetry*, in *Essence and Being*, W. Brock trans. (New York: Ungar, 1964)) which, however much it misses the spirit of Hölderlin’s imagery, is an ambitious effort to capture the philosophical import of poetic language, which Heidegger himself uses to the end of total obfuscation in his later works.

the fact that, between the Positivity-essay of 1795 and this essay of 1799, his style had changed dramatically. During this period, he had left Berne, where he felt completely cut off from everything, and moved to a tutoring job in Frankfurt, which Hölderlin had arranged for him. He spent two seemingly stimulating years in the active intellectual climate provided by his old friend, and in 1799 Hegel's father died, leaving his son enough money to allow him to think for the first time about an ill-paid but prestigious career in the universities. For the first time too he seems to have begun to think of philosophy as the answer to the questions he had been formulating awkwardly for years. Unfortunately, to be a philosopher with professional ambitions, then as now, meant that one had to be *profound*, i.e. obscure and *serious*, i.e. humorless and extremely tedious, and so Hegel began to learn the jargon and elongate and qualify his sentences in the "speculative" style of Schelling, who in fact was a much better and much livelier writer. Gone was the obvious sarcasm of the earlier essays. Edited out or qualified to death were the themes that earlier, if published, would have assured him life-long exile from the academic establishment (like the "young Hegelians" forty years later, including young Marx). Gone too was the fresh innocence of the social critic in his twenties taking on the whole of human nature in a few simple essays; no more simple "reflection" (i.e. ordinary attempts at understanding), only "speculation," which breaks through the distinctions of ordinary speech to provide a language which only a handful of colleagues can possibly understand. Whether Reality is better expressed thereby is a question which I do not want to take up here.⁸⁹

The "Spirit of Christianity," however, is still readable. Written in Frankfurt in 1798–99, it might at once be viewed as an extension of his arguments in the Positivity-essay and as a reaction against them. In particular, it is a reconsideration of Jesus and Christianity, a continuation of his doubts about Christianity as a possible vehicle for community spirit and his accusations aimed against the Jews for both Jesus' personal failure and the more insidious divisions within Christianity. What is quite new here is a rather sharp turn against Kant⁹⁰—whom Hegel now sees as embodying the same faults as Christianity rather than providing a viable alternative—and a much more accept-

89. See "Hegel's Crisis," in Harris, pp. 265ff, esp. p. 269. I think Harris is too sympathetic to Hegel's obscurity, and his own detailed interpretation would seem to indicate that his new language was more defensive and professional than philosophical as such. Cf. Harris's collaborator Walter Cerf on one of Hegel's later essays: "the more complex the grammatical construction of a sentence and the less clear its meaning, the more speculative it will be."

90. Hegel had finally undertaken a thorough reading of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* in 1798.

ing attitude toward what he considers the “spirit” of Christianity, now interpreted not in contrast to the Greeks but in contrast to Jesus’ own reclusiveness (“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s . . .”) as true community, “the Kingdom of God.”

The new ingredient, which Hegel had hardly talked about at all in his earlier essays, is *love*. Love is primarily a feeling, the *feeling of unity*. Lack of unity now becomes the culprit, the source of Hegel’s irritation—with the Jews for alienating themselves both from God and from other men, with Jesus and early Christianity for separating themselves from the rest of society, with Kant for distinguishing and setting against one another allegedly different faculties of the human soul—in particular duty and a sense of law against love and simple “inclinations.” Hegel’s task now becomes the unification of such separations (*Entfremdungen*); a few years later, he will define philosophy itself as just this, in his essay on the “Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy” (1801). And the vehicle he chooses for this task is the all-important but ill-defined notion of “Spirit” (*Geist*), which is mentioned on virtually every page of the essay. There is “human spirit,” “the spirit of God,” “spirit in nature,” “the spirit of Abraham,” “the spirit of Jesus,” and “the Jewish spirit.” Sometimes “spirit” means “mind,” sometimes “feeling,” often a motive force or a project for action. But in virtually every case, “spirit” means something like “inner unity,” and this will remain its primary meaning through the writing of the *Phenomenology* (and later too.)

The essay begins with another attack on the Jews, not because of their “positive” preferences but because of their demand for discord. In their view of God, they conceived of a supreme Being, Master of the world, *over and above* men, who thereby became God’s slaves. The story of Noah has special significance for Hegel (much as the Abraham story would take on special significance for Kierkegaard, years later); it represented in a single incident the absolute domination of God over man, even including God’s willingness to destroy—or threaten to destroy—everyone and everything if we refused to submit to his will. Moreover, Hegel says, the story of the flood expresses quite clearly the antagonistic attitude of the Jews toward nature, as an alien force, and Abraham expressed the same alienation of man from nature when he left his homeland of Chaldea, left his “natural” relationships, and refused, in his wanderings, to stop and settle the land, making himself at one with it.⁹¹ “The whole world Abraham regarded as simply his opposite,” and the family that he founded similarly saw themselves separated from the rest of the world as “the chosen people.”

91. Ibid. 185–87.

Now once again, it is important to disarm a certain kind of objection, that Hegel is here expressing only dislike for the Jews and that such comments are better ignored than quoted and considered. But what Hegel is after here is rather the original *structure* of the whole Judaeo-Christian tradition, which is, he says, to separate and pit one-self against others. In Judaism, the "others" include a transcendent God who rules over us, Nature, which is seen as an "alien being," and the other societies of the world, who are considered enemies or, at most, temporary allies. But the "master-slave" imagery of the Hebrew God and his people is not unique to Judaism; Hegel finds it in Kant too, and the philosopher who only a few years ago was considered his paradigm now becomes subject to the same abuse;

. . . between the Shaman of the Tungus, the European prelate who rules the church and state, the Voguls and the Puritans, on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own commands of duty, on the other, the difference is not that the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave. For the particular—impulses, inclinations, pathological love, sensuous experience, or whatever else it is called—the universal is necessarily and always something alien and objective.⁹²

One phrase here deserves our special attention, "pathological love." In his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785),⁹³ Kant had distinguished the emotion of love, which he called "pathological" (from "*pathos*"—feeling, but with the same negative connotations), from the love commanded by the Scriptures, "to love thy neighbor" and so on. Emotions cannot be commanded, Kant insisted; rational principles can be. But love for Kant comes down to universal *respect*, out of *duty*, the very antithesis of what Hegel means by the word. Influenced by Herder and the early romantics, Hegel insists that the love commanded in Christianity is indeed a feeling, but not at all a matter of duty. Indeed, what Hegel objects to in Kant is the very basis of the distinction Kant is making here, between morality, duty, reason, and law on the one side, and emotions, feelings, inclinations, and love in particular on the other. According to Hegel, at this particularly romantic juncture in his career, *love* conquers all, heals all wounds, is the one and only solution to the tragic Kantian-Christian severance of the human being into warring aspects—feeling against intellect, knowledge against faith, reason against inclination, personal independence against community spirit.

What therefore emerges from this essay is a conception of "the whole

92. Ibid. 211. The "master-slave" imagery here will play a crucial role in the *Phenomenology*, chap. 4, "Self-Consciousness").

93. Trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953).

human being," who transcends these splits in his or her personality and acts "in accordance with the law" as well as "for the sake of the law," without separating these as Kant had done. Rules and obligations conflict, Hegel points out, parroting an already familiar objection to Kant's rule-bound moral theory, but love "is the one living spirit which acts and restricts *itself* in accordance with the whole of a given situation, then and only then . . . the mass of absolute and incompatible virtues vanishes."⁹⁴ Thus Jesus is distinguished from Kant in a radical way, precisely the antithesis of the identity Hegel suggested between them in 1795. Jesus taught us to act "in the spirit of the laws," not out of "respect for duty."⁹⁵ Hegel here suggests some of the criticisms of Kant's ethics—which we shall pick up again much later—that universal laws do not tell us how they are to be applied and so are effectively without content,⁹⁶ as well as the contradiction between various laws and the intolerable antagonism between doing one's duty (against inclination) and the desire, out of inclination, out of love, to do what (it happens) one ought to do. One might say that Hegel is precociously defending what a few years ago was called "situation ethics," the idea that rules were often confusing and sometimes got in the way and so it is better to do what one "feels is right in the particular situation." Luckily, although Hegel continued his criticisms of Kant into his later philosophy, he saw right away that "love" and "situation ethics" were simply a way of hiding a problem rather than solving it. The *Phenomenology* has relatively little to say about "love."

Romantic soft-headedness aside, Hegel's view here has its solid foundations in the Greek view of virtue. For Aristotle, for example, virtue was a question of character, a matter of motivation. A man who did his duty without wanting to do it, who was "just doing his duty," would not be considered virtuous. So too, Hegel points out, the man who acts out of fear of punishment is not a good man. Punishment, even if necessary in a society, also serves to promote disunity. A trespasser, once punished, either sees himself in fear of the law (and thus alien to it) or suffers from what Hegel calls "bad conscience," which is tantamount to a war within himself.⁹⁷ What Hegel is driving at here,

94. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 245.

95. *Ibid.* 210.

96. *Ibid.* 214ff.

97. The notion of "bad conscience" introduces a split that will be one of the motivating themes of Hegel's later work as well:

"Such a conscience, as a consciousness of self in opposition to self, always presupposes an ideal over against a reality which fails to correspond with the ideal, and the ideal is in man, a consciousness of his own whole nature . . ." (241).

It is this "contradiction" between our ideals and the way we actually see ourselves which will motivate many of the transitions in the *Phenomenology*, and Hegel's argument here, quite the contrary of his supposed love of contradiction, is that such contradictions are intolerable and ought to be eliminated.

as in his earlier essays, is the need for a sense of community, founded on fellow feeling and friendship, in which it is the sheer ideal of unity that motivates our actions, whether or not one calls this "love."

Here too Hegel introduces a particularly existentialist notion of "fate" into his discussion; whatever happens to a conscious being, he argues, is its own responsibility. This is just as true of a people as it is of a single individual. Unforeseen events occur, of course, but always either as a result of one's own actions, or with at least some degree of cooperation, or, in any case, within an interpretation which is one's own. Thus the Jews made taxation by Rome their own fate, Hegel says, by refusing to fight to the death for freedom. It is an extreme view, reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre's harsh declaration during World War II that "there are no innocent victims in war." But for those who still think of Hegel as the ultimate philosopher of resignation and the status quo ("the real is rational . . ." etc.), these passages are worth reconsidering, and their "spirit" is equally evident in the later forms of the *Phenomenology* as well.⁹⁸

It is with this conception of fate in the background that Hegel here explicitly blames Jesus for the failure of Christianity (which is not yet necessarily "its fate"). Jesus "visualized the world as it was to be," but circumstances weren't ready for what he preached; love presupposes common needs and shared interests, as well as a shared faith, but "faith can only unify a group if the group sets an actual world over and against itself and sunders itself from it."⁹⁹ But this in itself makes universal love impossible, and so the sectionalized and fragmented cults of early Christianity were already antithetical to Jesus' intentions. But Jesus, instead of fighting these conditions, withdrew from them, as a "beautiful soul."¹⁰⁰

If any side of him is touched, he withdraws himself therefrom . . . to renounce his relationships in this way is to abstract from himself, but this process has no fixed limits . . . his own will, his free choice . . . a fate which he himself has consciously wrought . . . there is nothing in him which could not be attacked and sacrificed. . . . like a sensitive plant, he withdraws into himself when touched. Rather than make life his enemy, rather than rouse a fate against himself, he flies from life.¹⁰¹

Thus Jesus' celebrated "sensitivity" and "unearthliness," in Hegel's critical secular vision, is more akin to what Sartre would call *mauvaise*

98. *Early Theo. Mss.*, 228ff.

99. *Ibid.* 287.

100. *Ibid.* 235. The expression "beautiful soul" comes from Schiller. Hegel employs it in the last section of *Phenomenology*, chap. 6, "Spirit." The identity of Jesus as "the beautiful soul" is not made explicit there, but is more plausible as an interpretation than the usual references to Novalis and Romanticism.

101. *Ibid.* 235–36.

foi (bad faith) or like Camus's Clamence in *The Fall*, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew vii.1). It is in this context too that Hegel considers the Christian virtue of "forgiveness," not as a moral virtue but rather as an attempt to put oneself "above" the law, or to ignore it, but in any case to put oneself *outside* of it, thus alienating oneself from the body of society in general. Thus, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel will say,

The "beautiful soul," lacking an *actual* existence [that is, participation in the life of society] entangled in the contradiction between its pure self and the necessity of that self to externalize itself and change itself into an actual existence . . . this beautiful soul wastes itself in yearning and pines away in consumption.¹⁰²

But despite this attack once again on Jesus, Hegel holds out the hope that the "fate" of Christianity is yet to be determined, and its "Spirit" yet to be realized. In this essay, Hegel holds out the singular ideal of "love" as the message of Christianity and the "spirit" of Jesus' teachings. But what "love" means is just the feeling of unity,

Is there an idea more beautiful than that of a *Volk* of men related to one another by love?

The word "love" drops out, but the word "spirit" is ready to take its place. And even in this essay, this crucial term is beginning to take on the pantheistic, organic, *Bildung* image that defines the *Phenomenology*:

To the spirit, to life, nothing is given. What it has acquired, that it has itself become; its acquisition has so far passed over into it that now a modification of itself, is its life.¹⁰³

And it will be spirit, no longer love, that is "a unification of life, it presupposes division, a development of life, a developed many-sidedness of life."¹⁰⁴ It might be worth pointing out too that Schelling had just published a book, *The World-soul as a Hypothesis for Physics* (1798), in which "self-activity" rules the world. Here as in his later work Hegel begins to point out that *everything* in our lives, even nature, turns out to be *spiritual*, which is not yet presented as an ontological claim but rather as the anthropological view that everything, including biology and the necessities of life, are incorporated by a *Volk* into their culture, into their common ground for mutual identity and unity. It

102. *Phenomenology* 668.

103. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 294.

104. *Ibid.* 278. But one might point out the quaint remark in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, about "love disporting with itself" (§19).

is an innocent, plausible, and attractive thesis, and I would like to think that Hegel retained it, as the motive behind his rather "unbelievable" ontological thesis that "the universe is posited by a Spirit whose essence is rational necessity" that he saddles himself with later on.¹⁰⁵

The Professional Years: 1801–1806

Knowledge of the Idea of the absolute ethical order [*Sittlichkeit*] depends entirely on the establishment of perfect adequacy between intuition and concept, because the Idea itself is nothing other than the identity of the two.—*System der Sittlichkeit* (1802–03)¹⁰⁶

The conclusion that emerges from all of the early essays, none of them published until this century, is Hegel's fondness for the *Volk*, his celebration of community life or *Sittlichkeit*. His ideal is the ideal of unity, not only within small groups of people but, ultimately, it is hoped, within all humanity, as a single human "spirit." "The divine is in everyone," he declares in his "Spirit of Christianity,"¹⁰⁷ and Jesus is no one in particular. But these heretical views were unthinkable for a no longer young and not spectacularly bright man, now thirty, who was looking for his first university position. Consequently, his vision is compromised, his positions qualified, and his style becomes—abominable. In 1800 he begins a revision of the Positivity-essay, but the old style is replaced by a terse, academic abstraction.¹⁰⁸ He distinguishes between "concrete" and "abstract" human nature, and thus tries to resolve his life-long tension between particular *Volk*-identity and an international conception of *humanity*. But the old language of "natural religion" and "subjectivity" will no longer do the job, and even as Hegel rails against "understanding and reason"¹⁰⁹ and the "chatter" and "self-righteousness" of the Enlightenment, he already starts to

105. Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 538. Taylor's attitude toward Hegel is curiously ambivalent in this way precisely because he is so taken with the later ontology, which he finds not only "unbelievable" but also "quite dead," while he evidently admires Hegel primarily for his sense of *Sittlichkeit* and community. Odd, then, that both of his books should all but ignore the early writings and place so much emphasis on the *Logic*. Cf. Plant, *Hegel* on the same topics; also Schmidt, "Recent Hegel Literature."

106. Hegel, *System der Sittlichkeit*, trans. H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox, together with his *First Philosophy of Spirit* of 1803/04 (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1979), pp. 99–100.

107. P. 265.

108. "The living nature of man is always other than the concept of the same, and hence what for the concept is a bare modification, a pure accident, becomes a necessity . . ." (169).

109. *Ibid.* 172.

suspect that this is no longer his view, and the revision breaks off mid-sentence.¹¹⁰

In the same year, Hegel writes a “fragment of a system,”¹¹¹ one of those piles of paper found by scholars which are stretched beyond all credibility to provide evidence for some grand change of plan. The several pages are concerned with the Schellingian-Romantic problem about reconciling the finite with the infinite, man and God; and Hegel at this point in his career still thinks that religion in some sense might serve this vital role. But this faith in feeling was at most a residuum of last year’s thoughts, for with his entry into the profession of philosophy, professionalism takes top priority. His honest enthusiasm gives way to obscure and impersonal discussions of the “finite and the infinite” and “the union of opposites,” and his interests, though still founded on some of the same cultural and religious themes, become far more concerned with intra-professional polemics than the cultural commitment and curiosity of his earlier writings.¹¹²

In the “fragment,” Hegel argues that “philosophy has to stop short of religion,” but in his first published work—the *Differenz*-essay of 1801—he declared that philosophy, not religion, was the highest human endeavor, the only way to catch “the infinite in a system.”¹¹³ Schelling had just secured him his first position at the University of Jena (as an unpaid lecturer or *Privatdozent*) and Hegel was ready to prove himself. Nothing less than “the Absolute” would do.¹¹⁴

Among Hegel’s publications in the next five years, three stand out as exemplary. First is the *Differenz*-essay of the summer of 1801, which we have already discussed (at the end of Chapter 2). Second is the long and pretentious essay “Faith and Knowledge,” which he wrote

110. The criticism of the Enlightenment continues through the *Phenomenology*, much modified (541ff). What Hegel does not ever give up is his criticism of the Enlightenment as “self-certain” and dogmatic, particularly in its opposition to religion.

111. In Knox, pp. 309–19.

112. Harris, more sympathetically, explains the change in Hegel’s ambitions (as “German Machiavelli” and neo-Platonic philosopher-king) by the advent of Napoleon and the strengthening of the independent German states under him. But then, Harris tells us, “at Jena he began on quite a new path toward the sunlight, not of Plato’s city but of the Idea” (477). One would accept that more readily if Hegel had not spent so much of his time in the following years so obviously trying to establish his professional credentials, defending his allies, and attacking Schelling’s enemies. Indeed, however much “the Idea” might be an abstract encapsulation of his earlier interests, I would argue that its primary function throughout Hegel’s career is to deaden his thinking and render it “cold” in precisely the same way he earlier criticized the more “bookish” Enlightenment thinkers. And this is the same “cold march of necessity” that Hegel urges on us in the *Phenomenology*, which happily, in that book anyway, he neglects in his own “ferment of enthusiasm” (*Phenomenology*, 7).

113. Harris, p. 408.

114. On Hegel’s ambitions, see Kaufmann, p. 108ff. It is worth keeping in mind that, in 1804, Schelling had already published a half dozen books and achieved recognition as one of the leading philosophers in Germany.

in mid-1802, in which his philosophical ambitions and intentions are first straightforwardly (which is not to say “clearly”) stated. Third, there is the almost unreadable essay “Natural Law,” written in late 1802, early 1803. All of these were published in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* which Hegel co-edited with Schelling, and not surprisingly Schelling emerges as the paragon of philosophical accomplishment.

“Faith and Knowledge” is largely devoted to the task of analyzing the philosophical systems (or non-systems) of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte and showing that, on the one hand, they collectively represent the fullest realization so far of the ideas implicit in post-Reformation German culture and, on the other hand, that all three fail to fulfill the primary aim of philosophy—which is to demonstrate the unity, the necessary connectedness, of human experience.¹¹⁵ Although the title indicates a conflict and synthesis of “faith and knowledge,” the actual content of the essay reveals an attempt to put together the religious sensibilities of Protestantism with the merely empirical and “eudaimonistic” (secular) ambitions of the Enlightenment under the clumsy guise of the formidable terminology of “the infinite and the finite.” In fact, Hegel rejects both Protestantism and Enlightenment, the first because of its unworldliness, the second because of its “vanity” and “emptiness” (“a hubbub of vanity without a firm core”). Protestantism has renounced the world and finds itself longing after an impossible ideal (“infinity”):

Protestantism does not admit a communion with God and a consciousness of the divine that consists in the saturating objectivity of a cult and in which *this* nature and *this* universe are enjoyed in the present and seen in a sight that is in itself clear. Instead it makes communion with God and consciousness of the divine into something inward that maintains its fixed form of inwardness; it makes them into a yearning for a beyond and a future.¹¹⁶

Enlightenment, on the other hand, rejects the ideal of “infinity” and satisfies itself with the world. Its conception of life is limited to questions of happiness, and its conception of knowledge is limited to the merely empirical. Reason becomes mainly a question of mechanical calculation and has no sense of “an incognizable God beyond the boundary stakes of Reason.” Both of these discussions get picked up again in the *Phenomenology*, the first as “the Unhappy Consciousness” of chapter 4 and Enlightenment vanity as the “Self-alienated Spirit of Culture” in chapter 6. But the point of this essay is, ultimately, to

115. *Glauben und Wissen*, “Faith and Knowledge,” was originally published in Schelling and Hegel’s *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1, in July 1802. Trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1977). This quote, p. 56.

116. Ibid. esp. p. 148.

show how the three major philosophies of the moment,—Kant's, Jacobi's, and Fichte's,—derive their defects from precisely the same opposition between Protestantism and its “other-worldly yearning” and Enlightenment with its limited “this-worldly” horizons;

The fundamental principle common to the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte, is, then, the absoluteness of finitude and, resulting from it, the absolute antithesis of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the sensuous and the supersensuous, and the beyondness of what is really real and absolute. Within this common ground, however, *these philosophies* form antitheses among themselves, exhausting the totality of possible forms of this principle.¹¹⁷

“Faith and Knowledge” goes beyond the *Differenz*-essay in Hegel's first attempts to set up a place for himself in philosophy, not just as a disciple of Schelling (who is hardly mentioned in this essay) but as an accomplished philosophical critic in his own right. It also represents his first full-length attempt to come to grips with the history of philosophy in a technical way, anticipating some of the arguments against empiricism and the “metaphysics of subjectivity” that will occupy key positions in the *Phenomenology*. It is here too that he first comes to grips with Kant's philosophy as a whole, whereas before he had drawn from it as he needed certain principles, which he had too often accepted uncritically or criticized without any effort to see how they fit into the Kantian corpus as a whole. He also characterizes these three philosophies as the end of “the formative process of culture,” bringing to its ultimate stage that schizoid way of thinking (between “finite” and “infinite,” between “subjective” and “objective”) which has been implicit in the whole of the history of philosophy.¹¹⁸ Thus Hegel has begun to see the history of philosophy as a progression of increasingly developed positions, and though it is not yet evident here, he has already set up for himself—and not for Schelling—the possibility of the ultimate culmination and synthesis.

In terms of the *Phenomenology*, “Faith and Knowledge” already prefigures, though in a purely negative way, the development of a series of philosophical forms from the “finite” (that is, limited) view of the empiricist in the Introduction and first chapters (Locke is quoted in “Faith and Knowledge” in much the same terms that the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* begins)¹¹⁹ to the more developed philosophy of Kant (in chapter 3) and Fichte (in chapter 4). Jacobi is dropped out of the picture, for the familiar reasons (repeated by Hegel in almost

117. Ibid. 62.

118. Ibid. 189f.

119. Ibid. 63; *Phenomenology*, 73–89.

identical form in the *Differenz*-essay, in "Faith and Knowledge," and in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*), namely, that his philosophy of the incomprehensibility of the infinite and his appeal to "warm feelings" leave us nothing to say.

In "Faith and Knowledge" too, Hegel makes it clear that ordinary experience is inferior and intrinsically unsatisfying. It is the infinite that is "really real," but not cut off from the finite, from ordinary experience, which is what we find in Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte, who are the "totality of possible forms" of philosophy, so conceived. It is only by appreciating the over-all scheme of things, Hegel tells us, that individual life and mortality can make any sense to us. So it is here that Hegel begins to develop his thesis—so central to the *Phenomenology*—that "the infinite is immanent" and that "the Eternal Idea" (which is no more attractive or clear a concept here than it becomes in his later philosophy) is expressed in the world as a logical sequence of changes, that thought is not confined to the "subject" but defines the "object" of experience as well. Thought, he writes, is

the spring of eternal movement, the spring of that finitude which is infinite, because it eternally nullifies itself. Out of this nothing and pure night of infinity, as out of the secret abyss that is its birthplace, the truth lifts itself upward.¹²⁰

The "Natural Law" essay might well be paired with the unpublished and incomplete essay on "the German Constitution," which Hegel had stopped writing a few months earlier.¹²¹ But the focus of the "Natural Law" essay is not primarily political; indeed it is more of a social and moral concern, derived from Hegel's recent reading of Fichte's essay on the same subject which in turn was prompted by Kant.¹²² Indeed Schelling had developed a theory on the subject too,¹²³ and much of the opacity of Hegel's essay might be attributed (as in all of these essays) to the fact that he was writing, in effect, for a small closed group of scholars, all of whom could be assumed to know the jargon and the concerns of each other's works. But the main point can be stated clearly enough: Kant had insisted on the rational autonomy of every individual, his or her ability and right to act according to the dictates of the moral law "within." But on this view, all external authority (or "heteronomy" in the local jargon) was illegitimate or, at

120. "Faith and Knowledge," p. 190.

121. The essay is reprinted in Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, pp. 527ff., and in T.M. Knox, *Hegel's Political Writings* (Oxford, 1964).

122. Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (Jena, 1796, 1797); Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten* (Frankfurt, 1797). Hegel's own essay on "Natural Law" is translated by T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

123. Schelling, *Neue Deduktion der Naturrechts* (1796).

least, difficult to reconcile with the natural right of autonomy.¹²⁴ How then, could states govern? How could there be a legitimate “external authority”? This had become one of the leading questions of the Enlightenment, and its answer, condensed to a phrase, was to be found in “natural law.”

“Natural law” was the moral law, the authority of reason, writ large. In the ideal state, it was rational law writ down as a constitution, which thereby became not an external authority as such but an external expression of that same faculty of practical reason that could be found in the will of every (rational) person. But the question now repeats itself; if it is imposed from the “outside”—even if it is in fact the same rule of law that can be found on the “inside”—is it not still illegitimate, for the question of legitimacy (which is the same as “natural”) is not a question of content so much as a question of source. Where does the “natural law” come from?

One traditional answer to this question, which was flatly rejected by all of the German thinkers, was “the social contract.” Everyone agreed to obey the laws of the state, according to this familiar theory (in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, for instance) and by virtue of their agreement, the laws imposed from the outside were thereby their own. Hegel rejects this—though more clearly in the *Phenomenology*—not only on the familiar grounds that there was in fact no “original” contract but on the philosophically more powerful grounds that the “social contract” theory presupposes an utter absurdity—that there could have been fully formed, intelligent, and morally reflective human beings *before* the advent of society—which the social contract supposedly established. Natural law, therefore, could not be common agreement before the fact; natural law had to be itself an intrinsic part of the development both of individual human beings and society as a whole.

It is for this reason that the “Natural Law” essay dwells considerably on one of Hegel’s most important concepts—the concept of *Sittlichkeit*. We have met this word before. Hegel was lecturing on his “system of *Sittlichkeit*” to his students as he was writing the essay, and it is to become central to the *Phenomenology* and the later *Philosophy of Right* as well. It is, as we have introduced it already, the conception of “social existence” or what is sometimes called “ethical substance.” It is that complex of customs, rituals, rules, and practices that make up a society and make each one of us a part of society. It is not, as social

124. A recent discussion of this problem—still very much in the enlightenment frame of mind—is Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy from *Legitimationsprobleme Im Spätkapitalismus* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

contract theory suggests, an “external” package of laws that we voluntarily adopt, as if we were adult visitors in some foreign land. It is that set of behaviors through which we define ourselves, through which we learn what “morality” is and what is right and wrong. And to distinguish between our own individual autonomy, on the one side, and the set of practices of our society, on the other, is a prelude to conceptual disaster. Yet this is just what such theories as the social contract theory do to us, and the result is an emasculated picture of “the law” on the one hand, and ourselves—as creatures without a culture—on the other.

But Kant too falls into this trap. In his distinction between autonomy and heteronomy he too introduces this fatal distinction between our Selves (that is, as rational moral agents) and the social fabric and customs in which we were raised, which naturally become our “inclinations”—our emotions, moods, and desires. The concept of *Sittlichkeit*, therefore, is directly aimed against Kant’s theory of morality as well. Kant supposed that a moral law was universally valid, as a matter of rational principle alone, apart from any particular culture and practices. But this severs the all-important connection between our sense of morals and our sense of belonging to a society, and once this is done we seem trapped in the Rousseauan feeling (not unfamiliar among American undergraduates these days) that we are corrupted by our society and “indoctrinated” with its laws, instead of created through and by that society and those laws. *Sittlichkeit*, for Hegel, summarizes the “natural” synthesis of our moral sense and our social sense. Morality, properly understood, is not a matter of rational principles primarily (though that too, of course) but a matter of social practices and “good upbringing.” In this, as we shall argue later in our discussion of “Hegel’s Ethics” in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel becomes quite close to Aristotle. Indeed, the notion of *Sittlichkeit*, throughout Hegel’s works, is always looking back to the Greeks and the *polis*, for it is there, not in modern Christian state-less Germany, that the true sense of “natural law,” the unity of individuality and citizenship, is to be found.

It is time to move on to the *Phenomenology* itself. Hegel is already thirty-five years old, and we have already covered almost 200 pages in anticipation. In the following chapter, however, there will be still more by way of anticipation, as we first introduce the book itself, then the subject matter and purpose of the book, and finally, its formidable structure—or lack of it—which usually goes by the name “dialectic.”

Chapter Four (a)

The Phenomenology of Spirit

The Book

Jos Ant. Goebhardt's Bookstore, Bamberg and Würzburg, has published and sent to all good bookstores: G. W. F. Hegel's *System of Science*. Volume One, containing *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Large Octavo. 1807. Price: 6 fl.

This volume deals with the *becoming of knowledge*. The phenomenology of the spirit is to replace psychological explanations as well as the more abstract discussions of the foundation of knowledge. It considers the *preparation* for science from a point of view, which makes it a new, an interesting, and the first science of philosophy. It includes the various *forms of the spirit* as stations on the way on which it becomes pure knowledge or absolute spirit. In the main parts of this science, which in turn are subdivided further, consideration is given to consciousness, self-consciousness, observing and acting reason, the spirit itself as ethical, educated, and moral spirit, and finally as religious in its different forms. The wealth of the appearances of the spirit, which at first glance seems chaotic, is brought into a scientific order which presents them according to their necessity in which the imperfect ones dissolve and pass over into higher ones which constitute their next truth. Their final truth they find at first in religion, then in science as the result of the whole.

In the preface the author explains himself about what seems to him the need of philosophy in its present state; also about the presumption and mischief of the philosophic formulas that are currently degrading philosophy, and about what is altogether crucial in it and its study.

A *second volume* will contain the system of *Logic* as speculative philosophy, and of the other two parts of philosophy, the *sciences of nature* and the *spirit*. —Hegel's own description of the *Phenomenology* (*Selbstanzeige*) (1807)

The Phenomenology was conceived and written in the years 1804–6, while Hegel was teaching as a *Privatdozent* (an instructor, the lowest academic rank, paid by student fees only) and, in 1805, as *Ausserordentlicher* professor (roughly, assistant professor) at the University of Jena. The actual appearance of the book was preceded by a number

of very different announcements, and it seems Hegel was obviously uncertain himself, well into 1806, what his first great book was supposed to be. And indeed, it was intended to be a great book. Walter Kaufmann rightly comments that, at the age of thirty-six, when his younger friend Schelling had already become internationally renowned and had been publishing a book a year for several years, nothing less than a great book, a monumental effort, would bring Hegel out from under Schelling's shadow—particularly in his own estimate.¹ And yet, with all this ambition—or in part because of it—Hegel did not know what he was trying to do.

The book was written hastily, in a frenzy, with little rewriting and too little caution. With the book less than half finished by mid-year 1806, Hegel had to meet an October 18th deadline. (One of his friends had personally guaranteed delivery by that date to satisfy Hegel's reluctant publisher.) In fact, though he finished in time, he missed the date, due to extraordinary circumstances. Napoleon invaded the city on the 14th. Half of the manuscript was already in the mail, which caused Hegel no little worry. The other half stayed in his pocket, until the 10th, when he anxiously mailed it off to Bamberg.²

Struggling to meet his deadline, overburdened with a wide variety of university courses, while Germany was in the middle of the Napoleonic wars, Hegel did not have the opportunity to quietly meditate, as Kant had done for years, about the exact aims or intentions of his book. (Thus the belligerent opening of the Preface, in which he tells us that it would be "inappropriate" to tell us what these are: in fact, he didn't know.) He knew that he wanted to produce his own system. He knew that its introduction would have to establish "the absolute" unity of experience, at which point he could begin his study of logic and metaphysics—the subject matter of the book. But he had no definite plan how to get there. The result was a slapdash manuscript, sometimes bordering on incoherence (though the locus of the incoherence is disputed by the scholars).³ And the whole book, in effect, became nothing but the introduction, the establishment of "the Ab-

1. Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 129.

2. One might add to the list of Hegel's pressures the fact that he fathered an illegitimate child, probably somewhere in the early chapters. The boy was born Feb. 5, 1807, but presumably even a philosophy professor would have recognized the—er,—problem, a good several months before. Kaufmann goes into this in some detail (pp. 112–14).

3. Theodore Haering and Otto Pöggeler have argued that the book falls apart when it becomes historical, at the beginning of chapter 6 ("Spirit"). Charles Taylor thinks it begins to disintegrate by the close of chapter 3 ("Force and the Understanding").

solute." The intended subject matter, logic and metaphysics, would have to wait for another time.

Even when it was published, the *Phenomenology* was still to be the introduction to a larger system of "speculative philosophy," beginning with logic. Hegel had been lecturing to his students on logic and metaphysics—in the new post-Kantian "idealist" fashion, since 1801, as well as the "philosophy of nature" (Schelling's own speciality) a hodge-podge subject called "the philosophy of spirit,"⁴ which we today would call "the social and behavioral sciences" (psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science) and some of the "humanities" (history of art, religion, the history of philosophy). The "system," in three parts, was already in shape before the completion of the *Phenomenology* and would remain frozen in that form, as "Hegel's system," through several publications of *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (the first in 1817) and in his lectures until his death in 1831.⁵ The three-part structure of the "system," however, is only vaguely discernible in the structure of the *Phenomenology* itself. And in any case, the *Phenomenology* certainly stands alone, without the later work, as one of the towering achievements of philosophy.⁶

Until early 1806, when the book was still intended to be a book on logic and metaphysics, "phenomenology" was only a preliminary exercise, an introduction. The word did not appear in the title until

4. Hegel's first manuscript on the subject, in 1803–4, was primarily a treatise on the psychology of work and the family, the practical dynamics of everyday life and the development of language. (It is translated into English by H.S. Harris (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1979). It may be of some philological interest to note that Hegel sometimes uses the Latin word *mentis* to refer here to "spirit" or "mind," as opposed to "Geist," which he uses consistently from the *PG* (abbrev. *Phenomenology*) onward. The later subject, part three of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, includes both philosophy and psychology as well as anthropology and what Hegel calls, with some confusion, "phenomenology." The anthropology section deals with such varied subjects as character development and sleep, psychopathology, health, gestures and physiognomy, stupidity, habits, and sleep-walking. The "Phenomenology" section is divided up much like the *PG*, but with detailed studies of desire, drive, activity, satisfaction, self-consciousness, struggle, master and slave, need, universal self-consciousness, and, finally, reason. The last part, entitled "Psychology," deals with thinking, feeling, and happiness, respectively. Three volumes of the later work have been edited and translated by Michael John Petry (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977, in German and English together). The best analysis of the "Philosophy of Subjective Spirit" is Willem de Vries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1981).

5. At his death, Hegel was also beginning a revision of the *Phenomenology*. He was barely through half the Preface when he died, however, and so left us with the original work intact.

6. This view, of course, should always be balanced against the opposing view, still dominant—for example, Stanley Rosen's view that the *PG* can be properly understood and appreciated only looking back at it from the *Logic*. See also, Hans Friedrich Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung im Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt: 1965) and Fulda and Henrich (eds.), *Materialen zu Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"* (Frankfurt, 1973).

much later, when the book was almost completed. It was a term with a not insubstantial history in German philosophy—in Herder, for instance, and, most importantly, in Kant. Kant also used the word “phenomenology” to describe the preliminary study, the “prolegomena” to metaphysics. Phenomenology was the study of the structures of the world of experience (the world of “phenomena”), which could then be followed up by the metaphysical questions of “practical reason,” namely “God, freedom, and immortality.” For Kant, “phenomenology” was essentially the work of his first *Critique (of Pure Reason)*, the description of the forms of space and time and the conceptual structures of the understanding then a demonstration of the limits of experience and knowledge and the errors involved in trying to know what was more than “phenomena”—the world in itself—or “noumenon.” For Hegel, “phenomenology” came to occupy the whole of the system, for he had learned from Fichte and Schelling that there could be no “thing in itself,” no “noumenon,” and that therefore the whole of metaphysics too, even “God, freedom, and immortality,” would have to be carried out as phenomenology, the study of the structures of experience.

But the *Phenomenology* turned out to be something much more than that. What happened, we might surmise, was that Hegel began his explorations of phenomenology in a more or less routine Kantian fashion, coupled with his detailed knowledge of the ancient Greek philosophers and their metaphysical problems. (This is evident throughout the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*.) But then, he discovered something else. What began as a routine introduction, a “ladder” to the present standpoint in philosophy (in 1806) became something entirely different, a true phenomenology, not routine but an exploration, a series of realizations in which the point was no longer just to reach the top (“the Absolute”); it became the journey itself, the process of *doing* and *discovering* philosophy, that was all-important. Phenomenology ceased to be preliminary and took a life of its own.

Hegel began the *Phenomenology* as an academic treatise on idealism, showing his allegiance but adding his own improvements to Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, just as Fichte had “improved” on Kant, and just as Schelling had “improved” on Fichte (as Hegel himself had argued at length in his *Differenz*-essay of 1801.) Hegel wanted to compose his own system, beginning with a ladder from common sense (“sense certainty” or “natural consciousness”) to “the Absolute”—to solve the remaining problems in Kant, to “systematize” nature and freedom (already attempted by Fichte), to correct Fichte’s “one-sidedness” (which Schelling had already done in his “philosophy of nature,”) and to

tighten up the overly romantic and imaginative meanderings of his friend Schelling. It was not an extravagant project, however pretentious the word "Absolute" may strike us now. Indeed, if Hegel had only succeeded in accomplishing this academic task, his name would probably not even appear in our history books—nor that of Schelling either. At best, Hegel would be a minor footnote to Kant, preserved in some German *Archiv*.⁷

What Hegel did instead, was to defend a much more tangible and practical philosophy than idealism, which as a philosophical thesis, baldly stated, he considered absurd. What does it mean for a supposedly sane adult to say that "the world is mind-related" or "it's all Spirit"?⁸ This was precisely the kind of philosophical "abstraction" that Hegel had hated as a student. What interested him was the more existential theme of the new humanism; "it is a human world" or, in Sartre's now famous if nominally sexist formulation, "Man makes himself." But this too, stated abstractly, is worthless. Consider Sartre's own work in *Being and Nothingness*; when he toys with his various ontological proofs about the nothingness of consciousness and the indeterminacy of the "for itself," he is brilliant but unconvincing. It is when he turns to the examples—and not just because of his literary flair for vivid description—that he succeeds. He *shows* us what a mere argument will not prove to us. So too with Hegel; what he does in the *Phenomenology* is to take up the thesis of humanism and demonstrate it in a dozen different ways, in the realms of knowledge, society, morals and even religion. "The Absolute" becomes not an abstract philosophical thesis but the result of a score or so demonstrations, grounded in the concrete questions of life.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* might be compared to several other classic works; indeed, it has often been compared quite convincingly to Goethe's *Faust*, which it parallels in its ambitious imaginative structure. So too Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Or *Tristram Shandy*, a book about itself and defined by its own embedded self-references. In the per-

7. One can surmise that, had the project come off as originally planned, it would have looked in outline like the later "Phenomenology" that Hegel wrote along with his "Philosophy of Spirit" in 1825;

a. Consciousness as such:

1) Sensuous consciousness. 2) Perceptive consciousness. 3) Understanding.

b. Self-consciousness:

1) Immediate self-consciousness. i) Drive. ii) Desire. iii) Satisfaction. 2) The relatedness of one self-consciousness to another. i) Struggle. ii) Mastery and Servitude. iii) Communal provision. 3) Universal self-consciousness.

c. Reason:

1) Certainty. 2) Substantial truth. 3) Knowing and spirit. Notes. Index to the Text. Index to the Notes.

8. Consider again Heine's wonderful parody on Fichte's Idealism; "Himself as everything! How does Mrs. Fichte put up with it?" (*Germany*)

spective of Hegel's mature system, it is often viewed as comparable to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as the beginning but by no means merely "introductory" volume of a monumental philosophical effort. In its holistic monism, it is compared to Spinoza (not to mention Schelling). In its over-all teleology, however, it might best be compared to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, with its stress on organic metaphors and the emphasis on development. But what it is first of all is an enormously original view of philosophy, despite Hegel's academic intentions. And it is not just philosophy either, for the forms we follow through the *Phenomenology* are not just philosophical viewpoints—the history of philosophy, disembodied from the "conversation of humanity." They are "forms of consciousness," which are sometimes articulated by philosophers but have a life of their own—outside the seminars and the textbooks, in the streets of Paris and the beerhalls of Berlin. And yet again, Hegel remains very much the philosophical chauvinist, like Plato and Aristotle before him. The human spirit consists most essentially of conceptual thought, or "the Concept." The history of spirit is "the Self-Development of the Concept," what Aristotle called "the function (*telos*) of man." The book is, then, like most (but by no means all) philosophical classics, an epic story of philosophical self-congratulation. And yet it is a vision which Rudolf Haym in 1857 described as "the universe as a beautiful, living cosmos." It is not just a book for philosophers.

Hegel's Approach to Philosophy

As his manner of approach, Hegel conceived of a strategy that rendered his project extremely congenial: instead of adopting the usual academic arrogance of picking a position and defending it against all comers, gathering evidence for it and contrasting it favorably with the opposition, Hegel would simply ride the wave of all the great philosophers before him, from the pre-Socratics and Plato up to Kant and the neo-Kantians. He would flow with the conflicting but ultimately unidirectional currents of their efforts and be carried to the end, for a final summation.⁹ Thus, as opposed to his discussion of

9. Walter Kaufmann attacks Hegel from an uncharacteristically positivist standpoint when he argues that Hegel "fails to recognize what is really the heart of scientific and rational procedure: confronted with propositions or views, we should ask what precisely they mean; what considerations, evidence and arguments support them; what speaks against them; what alternatives are available; and which of these is the most probable." (Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 173). We will pass over the absurd charge that Hegel "fails to recognize . . . alternatives." But the demand for evidence and arguments for

Fichte and Schelling in the *Differenz*-essay of 1801, which he called “external,” he would in the *Phenomenology* actually *take up* their positions, and every other philosophical position, to see, *in their own terms* (thus, “internally”), where they would lead. In this way, he never actually *opposed* anyone: in a sense, all he did was go along for the ride. But what happened—what happens to hitchhikers in less abstract endeavors, boys on bicycles holding onto trucks on the freeway, skiers who ride the avalanche—was that Hegel not only got carried along, he got carried away. He was carried along by Plato and Aristotle and Kant, Fichte, and Schelling into unknown territory. He did not “complete” their various philosophies and establish “the Absolute”; he crashed through the academic walls of *Identitätsphilosophie* and German Idealism and destroyed the methodological assurances of philosophers since Plato. He almost came to the realization that there could be no realization of the Absolute, that philosophy had no “end,” that the unity of consciousness was to be found only in its diversity. He almost discovered that philosophy, and human nature too, were nothing but their history, without a terminus, without a Truth,¹⁰ without an essence. But he didn’t, and his later philosophy proves that. What he discovered he denied; and once again, academic philosophy remained protected from the philistines.¹¹

We will discuss Hegel’s “method” (or non-method) soon enough, but a simple question will suffice for here: in 1801, Hegel criticized Reinhold for his neo-Kantian intention to reject the history of philosophy as an array of errors, “a museum of mummies,” Hegel writes, and to simply “start over.” But what assures, Hegel asks, that this new system of philosophy will not be just one more error, one more mummy for the museum? No—that is not the way to proceed, Hegel concludes; what will guarantee philosophical improvement is to start from *within* these earlier philosophies, arming yourself with their strengths, inoculating yourself against their mistakes, and then proceeding, not

an isolated position is a wholesale misunderstanding of the Hegelian program. In 1801, Hegel attacked Reinhold for his attempt to carry out Kaufmann’s program. He flatly asserted that nothing would come of it.

10. In accordance with a contemporary convention, I will capitalize Truth when it refers to that specialized sense of “philosophical” or “absolute” truth (*die Wahrheit*).

11. Stanley Rosen, in his *Hegel*, draws a conclusion exactly contrary to this one. He sees the *Science of Logic* as the crowning achievement, appreciates the *PG* through the *Logic*, and celebrates the latter precisely because it provides a bulwark against what he calls “nihilism”—the subject of an earlier Rosen book. What I find so breathtaking and rewarding about the *PG*, to the contrary, is precisely this sense of “nihilism,” in the very Nietzschean sense, “the open sea before us; never has there been such an open sea,” as opposed to unified dogmatism which I have referred to as “the transcendental pretense,” to which Kant and the Absolute are central. See, for a very different kind of critique of the pretensions of post-Kantian philosophy, Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980).

by opposition, but by eclectic synthesis, to approach the truth through the whole history of both truths and errors. It sounds like an incredibly safe uncontroversial philosophy. But it didn't turn out that way. In fact, it was his acceptance of and continuity with the whole of Western thought that signaled at the same time his wholesale rejection of the dominant philosophical tradition, the idea that one finds the Truth by starting from premises agreed to be true, and proceeding from truth to truth. In the *Differenz*-essay of 1801, and in his Berlin Lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel continuously stressed the "constant essence of philosophy," Truth as "timeless" and philosophy, reason, as one (*das Gleiche*). In the *Differenz*-essay, Hegel writes: "Reason necessarily finds itself throughout all its particular forms . . . it intuitively itself as one and the same."¹² In another early declaration, he writes, "That philosophy is only *one* and can be only *one* rests on the fact that reason is only one . . . Reason . . . becomes philosophy and is only one and the same and therefore self-identical (*das Gleiche*)."¹³ And in his later Lectures in Berlin—

We must not regard the history of philosophy as dealing with the past, even though it is history. . . . What is obtained in this field of labor is the True, and, as such, the Eternal: it is not what exists now, and not then; it is true not only today or tomorrow, but beyond all time, and in as far as it is in time, it is true always and for every time.¹⁴

The quotations are revealing, and in the *Phenomenology* too, notably throughout the preface and the final chapter on "Absolute Knowledge," there is this constant insistence on the eternity of truth, the unity of reason, the essence of philosophy. But it is an error which hides the truth about Hegel. Buried beneath these Platonic images is the confusion between singularity and changelessness, for to insist that a process is a unity is surely not necessarily to insist that there must be any single principle that runs through the whole. (A strong rope may be composed of hundreds of relatively short threads, woven together into a single continuous braid.) Indeed, what Hegel would seem to have shown us is that philosophy and the forms of consciousness have no single essence, unless one wants to say that restlessness and change are their essence—which is something of a sleight of hand. Thus we see in Hegel much the same tension that one finds in the

12. *Differenz*-essay, p. 68.

13. In the introduction to the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1802.

14. *Lectures in the History of Philosophy*, trans Haldane and Simson, Vol. I, Intro.

ancient philosopher Heraclitus—the celebration of the reality of change, on the one hand, but the residual insistence on an underlying *logos*, which still retains the old prejudice for *stasis*, something that does not change, an anchor for eternal reason, an “absolute.” But why, we should ask at every turn, do we need an anchor? Or why, to use Hegel’s own terminology against him, does “the Absolute” have to be absolute at all? Perhaps, after all, “the Absolute” is just a word.

Hegel’s Language

Luther made the Bible and you have made Homer speak German. . . . I want to say of my own efforts that I will try to teach philosophy to speak German. —Hegel, letter to Voss (1805)

Here again, we see language as the existence of Spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing *for others*, self-consciousness which *as such* is immediately *present*, and as this self-consciousness is universal.
—*Phenomenology*

The *Phenomenology* is written with an obscurity that is inexcusable, even allowing for difficulties in the structure of the book, Hegel’s inconsistent motives and achievements, and the haste with which he composed his text. Some of the difficulty lies in the fact that Hegel goes out of his way not to tell us what he is talking about; the book is full of allusions to philosophers, historical and fictional figures, and topics without names. Walter Kaufmann rightly warns that this tends to turn the reader into a detective instead of a critical philosopher, and Hegel himself, Kaufmann suggests, often gets carried away with his allusions and turns his examples into the subject matter itself.¹⁵ In Hegel’s defense, we might point out that every philosopher, looking for examples, naturally finds them in the work he or she knows best, in books recently read or topics current at the time. But it is important, especially for a philosopher who throughout his work minimizes the importance of individuals, *not* to allow the reader the impression that he is concerned with a particular case, an *ad hominem* (or *feminem*) analysis, but in every instance the analysis of a *type*, a *form* of consciousness. Thus the preponderance of pronouns, where we would rather expect names and nouns, and the intentional vagueness of He-

15. Kaufmann, *Hegel*, pp. 144–46. Also Rudolf Haym: “The *Phenomenology* is psychology reduced to confusion and disorder by history, and history deranged by psychology” (*Hegel und seine Zeit*, p. 243).

gel's references. Part of Hegel's obscurity, then, is simply due to his attempt to make his arguments very general and not confined to just this or that problem or this or that philosopher or philosophical school.

There is a more profound form of defense of Hegel's obscure language, however, which not coincidentally has had particular popularity among Heideggerians, since it applies rather straightforwardly to the intentional and often perverse obscurity of their own master as well. This is the view that Hegel, running up against the limitations of ordinary language, was forced to invent his own language. Heidegger does this quite explicitly, and Hegel makes at least one Heideggerian point in the Preface of the *Phenomenology* to the effect that the subject-predicate structure of ordinary German (as English) is too easily and wrongly assumed to reflect the essential ontology of the universe. (*Phenomenology* 60–62). But this single comment hardly constitutes a theory of language, and it is surely not an announcement of so radical an intention as the revision of philosophical language as such. Hegel may or may not have invented a peculiar linguistic entity called “the speculative sentence,” but there is little substantiation in the *Phenomenology* that he has done so there. Furthermore, Hegel, unlike Heidegger, did not have the advantage of the considerable fund of modern research on the structures of language, although certain topics concerning the use of language emerge periodically in the *Phenomenology*.¹⁶

Consider, for a moment, a typical sentence from the *Phenomenology*;

The result was the unconditioned universal, initially, in the negative and abstract sense that consciousness negated its one-sided Notions and abstracted them: in other words, it gave them up. (134).

The sentence is ripped from its context, of course, but the difficulty is not just because of this. The use of specialized philosophical terms, the particularly clumsy grammar, the vagueness of reference—these block our reading even before we are ready to ask what the sentence means and how it fits into the larger work. But these difficulties also point to a partial explanation; Hegel is concerned with what he calls “the Concept,” or what many philosophers today would call “conceptual analysis.” That is, he is concerned not with the particular details of specific instances or events so much as he is concerned only with

16. For example, in chapter 1, “Sense-Certainty” and chapter 6, the section on “Culture.” For accounts of Hegel's special use of language, see Jere Surber, “Hegel's Speculative Sentence,” and Daniel Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1973). But the same considerations prompt Christopher Middleton's far more cynical remark that Hegel, thinking he was describing the Absolute, was in fact only describing the structure of the German sentence. For an excellent account of Hegel's own theory of language, see Willem de Vries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Part III.

universal conceptual structures and relations. This is common in philosophy, though it is rarely so brutally deprived of supporting examples and helpful analogies. We would like a few examples of “one-sided Notions”; we would like an example of an “unconditioned universal.” We are a bit uneasy about the phrase “in other words” equating “negated and abstracted” with the colloquial “gave them up,” and we are uncomfortable with the common Hegelian repetition of “in the negative and abstract sense” and “negated . . . and abstracted.”

Hegel has a nasty habit of introducing technical terms and phrases without warning or explanation; “the unconditioned universal” appears here without warning or explanation. Usually, what Hegel means by “unconditioned universal” is a concept. But here, the phrase refers not to a concept nor even concepts in general but rather to a philosophical theory *about* concepts (in particular, Kant’s theory; but this is not the place to explain this). There is a general and serious difficulty in the *Phenomenology* in that Hegel often fails or refuses to distinguish between concepts and views about concepts, using versus having concepts, recognizing versus having a concept of a concept. Thus the first and continuous problem of understanding Hegel’s language will be deciding whether he is talking about something particular (for example, a concept) or something more general (all concepts) or a philosophical theory (about concepts).

Next, notice the repetition of two key words, “negative/negate” and “abstract/abstracted”. First, these words are not used in their usual (German or English) senses; second, and worse, they are not even used in the same senses in their two appearances in the same sentence. “Negative” does not mean denial or demeaning; it means something more like “by reference to something else.” “Abstract” does not mean theoretical or abstruse so much as it means “partial” (or “one-sided”). But then, Hegel uses “negated . . . and abstracted” as equivalent to “gave them up.” The apparent repetition is something far more significant and difficult; it is an intentional play on technical homonyms, a verbal *dialectic* through which Hegel conscientiously prevents us from getting a firm grasp on his language.

From one dominant philosophical point of view, such ambiguity and verbal lack of precision is nothing but hateful. But if we are to understand Hegel at all, it is necessary to at least appreciate what he is doing and, at the same time, understand why it is that he is so hard to pin down and make precise. The key to the slipperiness of Hegel’s language is the phrase “the fluidity of the Concept,” which he learned from Hölderlin. The “fluidity” is indeed slipperiness, but the strategy is not perversity so much as it is a fundamental lesson in the philoso-

phy of (philosophical) language; *concepts are always context-bound*. Words have meaning because of the way they are played against one another. What counts as an “object” depends on the context; the number five is an object in mathematics, it is not an object in an antique shop. What counts as a “concept” depends on context too; a concept in architecture exists tangibly on a piece of blue paper; a concept in philosophy, according to Hegel, is not depictable in pictures at all. In philosophy, concepts themselves become objects (when they become the object of our examination, for instance). Objects become concepts, when we ignore their physical manifestation and attend only to what makes them an object of such and such a kind (their “essence,” according to a related terminology). Hegel plays these terms off against one another continuously throughout the *Phenomenology*, so much so that the reader is best advised to look not so much for the meaning as for the *interplay* of terms. It is this interplay that he later calls “dialectic”.

When Hegel contrasts a universal and a particular, it depends on the context which is which, and since contexts often overlap, Hegel will often play off the fact that a universal in one context is a particular in another. “Dog” is a universal (a concept) in contrast to particular dogs; “dog” is a particular (an empirical, specific concept) in contrast to the more general concept of a “living being.” But even “living being” is particular in contrast to the concept of “life” itself. The reader who is not familiar with Hegel’s philosophy could not be expected to understand the philosophical vision that lies behind this sequence of examples; but the point here is just to understand the point and purpose of Hegel’s unusual use of language. He uses (what we would call) abstract terms and plays them off against one another in various contexts. The philosophical word “immediate,” to take one more example, sometimes means “next to,” sometimes means “instantly accessible,” sometimes means “identical to,” with just that kind of variation that one would expect in ordinary English; my immediate kin is my brother, who is 3000 miles away. My immediate neighbor is a complete stranger, who lives right upstairs. My immediate reply to your question took 6/7ths of a second, while my immediate reply to your letter took two days. One can give a rough definition of the word “immediate” (*unmittelbar*)¹⁷ but more important is the understanding that it is in every case the *context* that determines the specific meaning. It is the *dialectical* use of philosophical terms, not their precise meaning, that illustrates the over-all point that Hegel is trying to make.

17. I have tried to provide such rough definitions of Hegel’s key terms in an Appendix to Part I.

What is that point? In one sense, it is simply the point that all concepts are context-bound, "the fluidity of the Concept." But in a larger sense, the point is that philosophical terms and statements are essentially interrelated; they receive their meaning and their plausibility (or lack thereof) only by virtue of other terms and statements, against a background of other claims and principles, within the history of a discipline which has developed a certain way of looking at the world and certain terms to express it. Indeed, the main point of the *Phenomenology*, which we will examine in the following sections, is just this historical unity of conceptual thought, the "dialectical movement" which holds our shared consciousness of the world together even as it pulls it apart with differences and conflicts of opinion. Hegel's language, and the structure of the *Phenomenology* itself, are composed precisely to make that point, indeed, a point which is rarely stated as such in the book because it is so incessant in the presentation itself. Hegel's language is not so much vague or obscure as it is itself the illustration of the dialectical thesis of the *Phenomenology*; the particulars of life are hard to pin down.

Notice that the subject of the illustrative sentence is *consciousness*. It is consciousness that "negates and abstracts" and "gives up" its notions. The subject is not "we" or "some philosophers" or "certain philosophical viewpoints" nor even "Western thought"; it is consciousness, in general, unqualified and unexplained. This is in itself a rather massive philosophical commitment, needless to say, and we shall spend many of the following pages trying to understand it. But in terms of Hegel's use of language, it raises a number of problems in addition to the metaphysical questions; usually, Hegel is content to use "consciousness" as the subject; occasionally, he interrupts this usage with "we" or "we who are watching the process." Sometimes, he does qualify "consciousness" as consciousness of a certain type, for instance "perceptual consciousness" (in chapter 2). This changes what first appeared to be an unusual philosophical voice into a chorus of contrapuntal voices. Distinguishing them and understanding the counterpoint is one of the most pervasive and difficult tasks in reading the *Phenomenology*. And the semantic properties of "consciousness" we shall find, are unlike the usual properties of speakers and subjects.

Notice how the translator retains the capitalization of "Notion" (from "*Begriff*") in this sentence.¹⁸ This is a standard convention, which we will continue in our discussion of the *Phenomenology*. But the use of capitalization must be viewed with caution; it distinguishes certain

18. I have throughout translated "*Begriff*" as "Concept," not as "Notion."

key philosophical terms, but it does not grant them special metaphysical status. If we capitalize the word "Truth" to distinguish a very special philosophical concern ("What is Truth?") from more ordinary attempts to learn "the truth about Ronald's private life," if we capitalize "Spirit" to distinguish Hegel's central term from more pedestrian uses of the term ("the spirit of the team"), that should be taken as a warning, not as divinization. The fact is, of course, that the carry-over from the German is most misleading, since *all* German nouns are capitalized and Hegel's own capitalizations were therefore nothing more than a matter of grammatical necessity. In our sample sentence, we might just as well have capitalized "Result," "Universal," and "Sense"; in following the convention we should also be continually wary of it.¹⁹

We said earlier that Hegel did not have the advantage of the comprehensive theories of language that we have today. And yet, Hegel did develop a quite sophisticated view of language and he did have the advantage of several prominent but conflicting theories. There were Platonic theories that treated the concepts that language expressed as independently existing entities, and there were Kantians who saw concepts as faculties of the human mind itself. There were "imagists" who conceived of concepts as images (John Locke, for instance), and there were nominalists who conceived of concepts mainly in terms of the use of words (David Hume, for example).²⁰ Most important, however, were two very broad views of language that were defended by the Enlightenment and Romanticism respectively (though of course there were wide differences of opinion within these movements.) The Enlightenment philosophers—Leibniz most famously—held the view that the concepts expressed in the various known languages were basically the same, and the essential concepts expressed in philosophy were the essence of reason itself. Indeed, Leibniz proposed the formulation of a universal language on precisely that basis:

19. The leap from grammatical necessity to ontological enthusiasm is nowhere more obvious than in Hegel's discussion of "the State" in his *Philosophy of Right*, which Karl Popper, for instance, takes to be something of a proof of Hegel's deification of fascism.

Other translation oddities from German into English have a more far-reaching philosophical effect. For example, in German there is the tendency to nominalize and personify expressions, such that an activity, for example, becomes a grammatical agency; instead of talking about *understanding* (*verstehen*) as an activity, expressed by a verb, Kant, Hegel, and their friends continuously talk about understanding (*Verstehen*) as an agency, expressed by a noun, which *does* things. Thus from "I understand x" to "the understanding grasps x" is a major step to the rather extravagant ontology of forces working *through* us (language, understanding, reason and, ultimately, "Spirit"), which is so central to German philosophy from Leibniz to Heidegger.

20. This discussion is abbreviated from de Vries, who borrows the terminology from H.H. Price, *Thinking and Experience* (London, 1953). We might note here that Hegel is decisively anti-"imagist"; he rejects the romantic emphasis on images (*Vorstellungen*) and insists on "the Concept" (*Begriff*).

concepts were the same, only the words were different. Certain romantic theorists, Herder for example, were more prone to stress the significance of the *differences* between languages. Particular languages define a particular people; a language defines a community as well as provides the vehicle for articulation through which that community expresses and recognizes itself.

These two different views of language reflect profound differences in both the concept of a culture and in the concept of a language. We have already discussed the differences between the emphasis on “culture” among the romantics and the emphasis on universal “humanity” in the Enlightenment, but the differences in the views of language have even far more striking consequences. Insofar as Hegel argues that language is capable of grasping the Absolute through concepts, he is committed to the Enlightenment view (and antagonistic to that romantic view of Jacobi and others which denies this). But insofar as he follows Herder (on a more philosophical level) and insists that language is part of and intrinsic to a particular form of consciousness, Hegel is committed to a more daring thesis to the effect that the *concepts* expressed by various languages might be different too.²¹ These two conceptions of language are at odds with each other and reflect the more general tension between historicism and absolutism in Hegel’s philosophy. Not incidentally, this tension also wreaks havoc on Hegel’s language, resulting in even more obscurity and awkwardness of expression.

Hegel’s language is an essential ingredient in his philosophy, not merely the vehicle of its expression. His constant word play and ambiguity makes precise analysis difficult if not impossible, but what is important is understanding what a sentence is *doing*, just as much as trying to understand what it means. Reading Hegel involves a kind of textual hermeneutics that is not usually necessary in reading the great philosophers, but then, it is just this that Hegel holds against

21. The crucial distinction here, between words and concepts, becomes apparent in questions about translation. If it were the case, as we suppose for convenience in Berlitz courses and college language labs, that different words in different languages had the same sense, the same meaning, expressed the same concepts, then different languages as such would not be of any philosophical significance. Hegel in English would *mean* exactly the same thing he means in German. But if it is the case that different words in different languages also have different meanings, express different concepts, then the difference in languages has an enormous philosophical implication, that the two languages may not really be inter-translatable at all (at most, we can get an approximation that allows for cooperation and some degree of understanding, but no more). Hegel in German is thus not Hegel in English, and a fully bilingual scholar is stuck with two Hegels instead of only one. All of this is independent of another question, however—whether cultures with different concepts, whether or not they share the same language, share a phenomenology.

the great philosophers, that they do not see themselves in context and do not see their language as a "fluid" medium of consciousness. Hegel's obscurity may be regrettable, but it illuminates a pervasive philosophical message all the same. Hegel's language may be extremely difficult, but it is language, he insists against the romantics, that makes knowledge possible at all.²²

And yet, with all of this said, what cannot be denied is the fact that Hegel could have been clearer; his ambiguities could have been explained; his "dialectic" could be less perverse. Indeed, when we consider Hegel's earlier essays, which were for the most part clear, witty and provocative without the learned obscurity, his language in his "mature" works becomes more intolerable. Moreover, in the year or so just after publication of the *Phenomenology*, having lost his professorship at Jena, Hegel edited a popular newspaper in Bamberg. He knew how to write a simple coherent German sentence. The profundities of dialectical thinking aside, why did he refuse to do so?²³

The first and most obvious if unflattering reason is that Hegel discovered, like hundreds of academic hopefuls before him and since, that obscurity and profundity are easily confused, that the smaller the audience, the more academically acceptable one is likely to be, and that the harder one is to understand, the less likely one is to be refuted. We can mark the change in Hegel's style with precision; it changes abruptly in 1799–1800, when he was seriously looking for an academic post. It reached its nadir in 1800–1803, with his first university position, in the *Differenz*-essay of 1801, the essay on "Faith and Knowledge" of 1802, and the all but unreadable essay on "Natural Law" of 1803. On the basis of this, he was promoted in 1805.

The second and not unrelated explanation was Hegel's disdain for "popular" philosophizing. In his review of Fichte in the *Differenz*-essay in 1801, Hegel made no mention of Fichte's most popular work, published the year before, *The Vocation of Man*. In that work, Hegel told Schelling, Fichte had compromised himself; he had become "dogmatic, not speculative." And in a famous letter to Schelling, Hegel even back in 1795, had said, "I feel sorry for Fichte; beer glasses and

22. Thus sense-certainty, the first form of consciousness to be considered, fails precisely on the ground that "it cannot say what it means." It is worth noting that Hegel also ordered the arts, as well as conceptual forms, on the basis of their conceptual competence. Thus poetry and drama earn accolades as the "highest" of arts, precisely because they are articulate and, Hegel adds, "on the way" to philosophy.

23. It is in reference to Hegel's "Faith and Knowledge" that Walter Cerf suggests that "the stylistic rule of [Hegel's early] essays seems to be this: the more complex the grammatical construction of a sentence and the less clear its meaning, the more speculative it will be" (in his introduction to his (& H.S. Harris's) translation of "Faith and Knowledge" (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1977), p. xxii.).

patriotic swords have resisted the force of his spirit." And he added, "perhaps he would have accomplished more if he . . . had only attempted to educate a quiet, select little group."²⁴

Third, Hegel attempts to introduce into his text (without quotation marks or references) whole passages in literal translation from the Greek philosophers, particularly in the early chapters. Literal translations are awkward enough, but even more so when incorporated unannounced into already obscure ("speculative") philosophical prose.

Fourth, of course, there is the awkwardness of the German language, especially when translated into English (Nietzsche lamented the fact that he could not write in French or English.) Idiomatic phrases and complex constructions do not translate well, but a literal translator feels forced to be faithful to them.²⁵ If it is any comfort to the English reader, German translators have often said that Hegel reads even worse in German.²⁶

Fifth, and perhaps more fanciful, Nietzsche has suggested that Hegel's atrocious style is largely due to his *fear* of expressing himself:

No famous German had more *spirit* than Hegel; but he felt such a great German dread of it that he created his peculiar bad style. The core is a witty, often saucy idea . . . the wrapping is abstruse science and supremely moral boredom.²⁷

In that brief comment Nietzsche best sums up the view that I will be entertaining here—that it is the *spirit* and the "witty, often saucy" core of Hegel that is worthy of admiration, while the *letter* of his work—or its "wrapping"—is not fit for emulation. One can excuse Hegel's language just so far, but then it is time to appreciate the liveliness of the book itself.

24. Letter of August 30, 1795, in Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 304.

25. Thus the particular awkwardness of the old Baillie translation of the book, as *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). Kaufmann's translation of the Preface (in his *Hegel*) shows just how well the German idioms can be captured in familiar English. A.V. Miller's full translation leans toward the literal and so often loses the vernacular flavor of Hegel's prose.

26. For example, Walter Cerf, in his Introduction to the *Differenz*-essay, p. viii.

27. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, ¶ 193, translated and quoted by Kaufmann (*Hegel*, p. 119).

Chapter Four (b)

The Phenomenology of Spirit: Its Purpose (“Truth”)

The objects of philosophy, it is true, are upon the whole the same as those of religion. In both, the object is Truth, in that supreme sense in which God and God only is the Truth. Both in like manner go on to treat of the finite worlds of Nature and the human Mind, with their relation to each other and to their truth in God . . . —Hegel, *Logic*

The stated goal of Hegel’s philosophy is Truth.²⁸ But then, every non-fiction writer is after the truth, and most fiction writers too. Hegel even tells us, in effect, that “truth” is the goal of every human activity—art, ethics, religion, and politics as well as mathematics, science, and philosophy. And to make matters worse, the idea that philosophy is “the search for truth” too easily suggests that Hegel’s goal is the collection of infinitely many tidbits of truth, a *potpourri* of little insights and suggestions, different from an empirical science such as botany or numismatics only in its unrestricted scope. (He too calls his work “Science.”) Thus even in his own day, critics accused Hegel (and his friend Schelling) of doing nothing more than collecting haphazard bits of empirical sciences and occasional anecdotes from history and the humanities and organizing them (badly) under a few abstract headings. There is the standard story of the unperceptive critic who challenged Hegel to “deduce his fountain pen” from his system of philosophy;²⁹ and critics who should know better still seem to think that what Hegel means by “Encyclopaedia” and “absolute Science” is

28. *PG*, 1, in the *Logic* p. 1.

29. The critic was a quite well-known philosopher at the time. He was Wilhelm Krug, who was given Kant’s chair at Königsberg after the great philosopher’s death in 1804. Hegel had published a bitingly sarcastic essay on him in the *Critical Journal*, in which Hegel takes Krug to task for his “petty” philosophical outlook. The criticism is repeated in a footnote to the 1827 *Encyclopaedia*, in the *Philosophy of Nature* (p. 23): “One could perhaps give him hope that *his* pen would have the glory of being deduced, if ever philosophy should advance so far and have such a clear insight into every great theme in heaven and on earth, past and present, that there was nothing more important to comprehend.”

the impossible claim to have incorporated all of the truths of the world, once and for all, into a single all-encompassing “system.”

What Hegel’s system is about, its goal or purpose, has little to do with the details of the empirical sciences—in fact, it has only tangentially to do with “science,” in our sense, at all. What Hegel means by “Science” or *Wissenschaft* is the general, disciplined study and understanding of the various forms of human knowledge, including science (that is, empirical sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology) as well as art, religion, ethics, and philosophy. It is an attempt to be clear about the whole of life, and to determine the place of these various endeavors in life, to rank them according to their adequacy and their priorities, paying attention to their details only by way of illustration (granted that he sometimes gets carried away with the illustrations). It is an ancient enterprise, and an on-going one. One person says that art is the meaning of life; another insists that the essentials of life are human interrelationships; still another says scientific knowledge, and another says God and religion. One more, a philosopher, no doubt, blandly insists that the good life includes them all—and who can disagree? But then the question of their place and priorities and adequacy remains unanswered, which perhaps might not be of any importance to a creature with infinite time and no conflicts in life, but not for the rest of us. Philosophy, in a phrase, is getting clear about what we know and how to live. The Truth, for Hegel, consists not of the details of life but of that single all-embracing, self-reflective philosophical vision, in which all of the pieces fall neatly in place.

The Truth that is the goal of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* has to do with knowledge, of course, but it would be misleading to think of knowledge strictly in the sense of “knowing that” the world is such and such. Hegel’s Truth, and his conception of knowledge, is also *practical* knowledge—“knowing how”—and it is, most of all, *self-knowledge*, reflection on one’s own activities and their significance. The goal of Truth is thus more akin to a kind of self-confidence—about oneself and one’s position in and knowledge of the world—than it is just another set of doctrines, however impressive or profound.

With this in mind, we might insist that the *Phenomenology* is not only a book about Truth; it is also a treatise on the good life and human happiness. It is something of an ethics, with its crowning achievement—as in Aristotle’s *Ethics*—the life of “contemplation,” the life of complete understanding, the life in which the meaning of the whole and our own essential part in it becomes clear to us.³⁰ It is also the

30. Rosen, p. 37.

search for a unified Truth—a single, all-embracing vision of the world—a quest too easily neglected in the pursuit of particular philosophical or scientific problems. Imagine Kant, for instance, reading once again Newton's *Principia*, expressing wonder at “the starry skies above.” At the same time, think of Kant the devout moralist, remembering his mother's moral urgings to strive for “holiness” and stressing “the moral law within.” But how do these two aspects of life fit together? How can life be separated into two worlds, two selves, and both of them all but indifferent to the emotional existence of other people? To Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, such a schizoid world was utterly unacceptable (as it was, ultimately, to Kant). Philosophy had to be the quest for over-all unity and comprehensibility, not piecemeal analysis and justification of particular human endeavors—even such large human endeavors as science and morality. Truth had to be first of all this comprehensive world-view, in which the order and the intelligibility of the various forms of human experience could be established.

From a theoretical point of view, the Truth might be conceived as a philosophical doctrine establishing the unity and intelligibility of our experience and the world. It is, in more traditional terms, an account of our knowledge of the world such that we can be assured that the world is indeed comprehensible and, equally important, comprehensible by us. But from a more practical point of view, the Truth is concerned rather with human happiness or well-being—*eudaimonia*, in Aristotle's language. And like Aristotle, Hegel found the ultimate ingredient in that Truth the philosophical life of contemplation. The Truth, in other words, was mainly *thinking*, in particular thinking about thinking (Aristotle's formulation again.) The good life, the best life, was the life of the philosopher.

If there were no more philosophical reason for questioning Hegel's “Absolute,” this alone, for non-philosophers, should be sufficient. Why, pray tell, should the Truth, so defined, turn up ultimately in the realm of the philosophers? One answer is to be found in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*:

... history is written by learned men and so it is natural and agreeable for them to think that the activity of their class is the basis for the movement of all humanity, just as it would be natural and agreeable for merchants, agriculturalists and soldiers to entertain such a belief. (If they do not express it, it is only because merchants and soldiers do not write history.)

If one defines “the Truth” as an all-embracing harmonious participatory view of the world, as Hegel often does, it is clear that philosophy at least has a role in the search for truth, if not, perhaps, an

“absolute” role. But if we are to understand Hegel and his philosophy, it is just as important to appreciate the large roles he gives to *non-philosophical* pursuits. Indeed, he abuses Schelling among others precisely because his friend sought to summarize the whole of creation in a simple slogan, “All is One.” But making sense of the world does not consist in abstracting oneself from it, wrapping it in a piece of philosophical tissue paper and sticking a label on it. It consists just as much in *engagement* as reflection, living the details while paying attention to the forms.³¹ The goal of the *Phenomenology*, accordingly, is not so much to present us with a single all-embracing conclusion about human life so much as to appreciate, live through, and put in their place the multitude of forms of human existence, through which non-philosophers too live their lives and give them meaning.

The Problem of Truth

Facts get in the way of truth. —Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

Pontius Pilate cynically shrugged his shoulders—“What is Truth?” It was not a question. But philosophers have not been so contemptuous; truth is their profession, their calling. Whatever else a philosopher gives us, we expect an answer to the problem of Truth, and an answer to Pilate’s non-question.

Philosophers talk about “the problem of Truth.” What problem? The man-on-the-street, like Pilate before Christ, would not see any problem at all, nor would a great many contemporary authors who have been baptized back into common sense by Wittgenstein. Indeed, one might well argue that there is no “problem of Truth” as such. Philosophers found a problem because they created it themselves, or rather, because other philosophers created it before and for them. Aristotle found no problem there; he bluntly stated what no one could seemingly deny, that “to say of what is, that it is, is true.” But later philosophers, being philosophers, showed that that wouldn’t do at all, and other philosophers started to deny that there was such a thing as “the Truth,” or at least, a Truth that could be known by us. In response to this, a new generation of ingenious thinkers—notably Kant—began to suggest that the Truth was of our own making. Enter Hegel. The problem of Truth for him is the creation of his predecessors. But

31. This is Sartre’s definition of “dialectic,” in his *Critique de la Raison dialectique*.

not only this. These problems have been created out of “common sense” usage, and philosophers, from Aristotle to Kant, only made them explicit and developed them. But this means too, that the answer to these problems cannot be, as in Wittgenstein and G.E. Moore, a return to common sense, for if Hegel is right (and German philosophy in general has tended to agree with him) it is the lazy dogmatism of so-called “common sense” that gives rise to these problems in the first place.

The problem of Truth, Hegel tells us later (in his lectures on the history of philosophy, in the 1820s) is to “reconcile Concept and Reality.” Elsewhere, he tells us that the problem is to reconcile “the Concept with itself.” For any modern philosophy student, these two formulations should be perfectly familiar—canonized (since Hegel’s time) as “the correspondence theory of truth” and “the coherence theory of truth,” respectively. The correspondence theory insists that truth is a one-to-one matching (or “correspondence”) between our concepts (beliefs, statements, or judgments) and “the facts” of reality. The coherence theory rather insists that truth is internal agreement and interdependence of our concepts (beliefs, statements, or judgments), and not “correspondence” to anything “outside” our experience at all. “The facts,” according to the coherence theory, must be functions of our concepts.

Hegel rejects the correspondence theory completely; he agrees that an adequate theory of Truth must account for our knowledge of particular facts and objects, but particular facts and objects are not the focus of Hegel’s quest. The primary demand for a theory of Truth is that it provide us with the structure of reality (“the Absolute”) as a whole and demonstrate the all-embracing coherence of reality and our knowledge of it. Thus Hegel leans toward (but does not exactly adopt) a coherence-type theory. Indeed, one of his primary requirements for a theory of Truth is that it be wholly self-contained, and that it be able to demonstrate its own adequacy. It is not enough to account for the truth (lower-case “t”) of our ordinary empirical beliefs (the province of the correspondence theory). A philosophical theory of Truth must also explain the nature of philosophical Truth itself, in other words, establish the validity of an all-embracing model of the world and our knowledge of it rather than simply assuming such a model and arguing from it.

What is Hegel’s conception of Truth? First of all, it is a heavily *practical* conception of Truth, with strong affinities to what has been defended in this century (by William James and others) as “the pragmatic theory of truth.” (Harvard pragmatist C. I. Lewis traced his own views to Fichte; John Dewey referred his work to Hegel.) Second,

because he is so keenly aware of the historical development of the concept—as well as “the problem” of truth, Hegel sees, as too few philosophers do, that any answer to this so-called problem cannot be merely formal but must be explicitly situated in and traced from the whole history of human thought. “Truth” is a concept which must be understood in terms of its historical, and philosophical, development. And third, because the so-called problem of truth has emerged through philosophical criticism from seemingly unquestionable “common sense” origins, the whole problem of truth, together with any proposed solution to it, must be situated in common-sense consciousness as well; it must be shown to be indeed a problem, rather than a philosopher’s sophistry or, in Wittgenstein’s felicitous phrase, “language going on a holiday.”

What is the “problem”? In a narrow sense, one might say that the problem of Truth is the fact that some philosophers, with good arguments, have claimed that there isn’t any, or that we cannot know it. But this problem—which goes by the ancient and honorable name *scepticism*—has been solved, or so Hegel believed.³² The solution was Kant’s revolution, and though incomplete, Hegel considered this to be the starting point of all modern philosophy, and in particular, the basis of any theory of Truth. According to Kant, the problem is not whether our concepts conform to objects, but rather how our concepts *determine* the objects of our experience. The old problem (that is, before 1781 and Kant’s first *Critique*) had been—Is there anything that our “representations” represent? And if there must be, how could we possibly know this? The new problem, since Kant, and since Fichte’s variations on Kant, is—What are the possible *forms* of the Truth, and which ones are the best? Hegel sometimes says that the Truth is but the *content* of all experience, conceived in terms of various forms. Other times, he talks as if Truth itself is but the best form, all-encompassing and absolute. Ultimately, he claims to reject the distinction between “form” and “content” (*Logic*, 133ff.) but this distinction plays too central a role in the *Phenomenology* to be simply dismissed.

The concept of “Truth” (*die Wahrheit* or *das Wahre*)³³ in Hegel’s phi-

32. The role of scepticism in Hegel’s philosophy is confused by the fact that we quite naturally think of the modern version, *à la* David Hume, while Hegel distinguishes rather sharply between the modern version and the ancient Skeptics, Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus. He thoroughly repudiates the former, including Hume’s German counterparts (e.g. Gottlob Ernst Schulze, whom Hegel takes apart in an early essay), but praises the latter for its rightly aimed attack on common sense dogmatism. In the remainder of the book, I will refer to Hegel’s discussion of ancient Skepticism (in *PG*, chap. 4) as a proper noun with a “k”, but refer to epistemological scepticism as an ordinary noun with a “c.” See also, Hegel’s remarks on Hume in the *Logic*, ¶ 39.

33. I have tried to find some systematic usage for the two terms in the *PG* but have not succeeded in doing so. Usually, “*die Wahrheit*” refers to philosophical Truth, “*das Wahre*” to more ordinary truth, but not always.

losophy might best be thought of in terms of “purpose” or “goal” or “ideal,” rather than the more limited conception of “truth” as in “true belief” or “knowing the truth.” The problem of Truth as developed from Aristotle, culminating in scepticism and resolved by Kant is but a narrow selection of the problem Hegel is worrying about, in which the post-Kantian question about the possible forms and priorities of experience cannot be considered in the realm of epistemology alone. Truth is the purpose of every human activity; truth in a scientific inquiry is the best explanation, the most complete account. Truth in art is beauty, (as Keats told us only a few years after Hegel had written the *Phenomenology*). Truth in ethics is moral rectitude. “I am the Truth,” said Jesus, pointing to his own ideal status as the ultimate object of faith. In his *Logic*, Hegel points out the etymology of the word “true” (*wahr*) in German—which turns out to be the same in English—such that it originally meant “faithful,” as in “a true friend” or, in marksmanship, “true aim”—right on target and faithful to one’s intentions.

The theme here, again, is Aristotelean—the idea that “every art or science, every investigation, action and choice, seems to aim at some good” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book i, chap 1.). But the question then immediately follows, whether these various “goods” are in turn aimed at some further good, and perhaps some single ultimate good. Aristotle says “yes”, and that single, ultimate good is called “happiness” (*eudaimonia*) or simply “doing well.” So too, for Hegel, there is an ultimate Truth. But then again, according to both Aristotle and Hegel, we have to see what this ultimate end consists in. If it includes, as it must, all of the various good things in life, what we need is an account of their natures and roles. In Aristotle’s time, despite his own emphasis on “the contemplative life,” the most important single feature of life was *honor*, one’s standing among one’s fellow men. In an earlier era, the warrior virtues were most important of all, and in a later time, the Christian era, faith became the ultimate virtue. By Hegel’s time, and in Hegel’s place, there were no such clear-cut answers. The Enlightenment celebrated reason, the Romantics feeling and sensitivity. Science was already making its demand (which we now seem to accept) to be recognized as the new source of infallibility, while religion still held onto its Teutonic flocks with a home-grown attractiveness that had diminished but little since Martin Luther. What philosophy needed, therefore, was a new Aristotle, to once again put the pieces in their place under the philosophical heading of “Truth.” Science and the sciences would have their place, of course, but only along with art, society, history, biology, sex, and “enlightened” cocktail party conversation (*Phenomenology* VI, B, i,a). And if Science (*Wissenschaft*)

would retain the highest role in Hegel's scheme, it might be anticipated that the sciences (physics in particular) would be relegated to a lower position.

Hegel's own characterization of "philosophical Truth"—the sort of Truth demanded by Science (*Wissenschaft*)—is that it must be "unconditioned." The truths of particular activities are "conditioned" by their contexts; for example—what counts as "art" or as "good art" (or as "bad art" or as *Kitsch*) at any given time is "conditioned" by the art world, by the current canons of aesthetic taste, by the art market, by the work of already established artists, by the words of the critics. Scientific truth, though sometimes thought to be "absolute" and "unconditioned," is also dependent on the current criteria of what Thomas Kuhn calls "normal science"—what hypotheses are considered sensible, which worth testing, what worth funding, who worth encouraging, and so on. It is also "conditioned" by the equipment available for testing and measuring, as well as the accepted standards of evidence. Aristotle was not unreasonable in the eyes of his times because he trusted his reason more than his senses, for example, in considering the question of the relative speeds of larger and smaller falling bodies. Even if he had appreciated our more modern reliance on demonstrations, he would not have had the instruments to carry out the appropriate experiments. Thus science, like art, is merely "conditioned," "true" only within some specified context of opinions, theories, attitudes, and values. Philosophy, on the other hand, is supposed to be "unconditioned" in the sense that it provides the context *within which* all of these other endeavors are defined; it provides the goal toward which they aim, like *eudaimonia* in Aristotle's characterization of the good life.

And yet, Hegel seems more aware than any other philosopher, before him or since, of the contextual dependencies of philosophy as an "expression of the spirit of its times." Here again, we see that deep rift which keeps appearing in Hegel, between his declarations that philosophy is "absolute" (i.e. "unconditioned") and his precocious recognition that it too is a practice among other practices, "conditioned" by its own history, "conditioned" by the opinions and attitudes of the society in which it plays an integral part, "conditioned" by the material exigencies which Marx and Engels would later declare to be the "basis" for all ideology. But without trying to resolve this tension, we can say simply that philosophy, for Hegel, is the ultimate context which provides the goals for every human endeavor, at any given point in history. But this in turn includes the whole of human experience, the whole of previous human history, the context of all con-

texts, and in *that* curious sense it is “unconditioned”. This all-embracing picture, the inner aspiration of human consciousness to comprehend the world and itself, is called “Truth.”

Reason and Rationality

... Reason is purposive activity. . . . in the sense in which Aristotle defines nature as purposive activity, purpose is what is immediate and at rest, the unmoved which is also self-moving . . . —*Phenomenology*

The concept of “truth” is typically coupled, in almost every philosopher, with either “knowledge” or “reason.” Typically, it is accompanied by both. But this seemingly sensible trinity had been thrown into disarray by the modern epistemologists—by Hume, who demonstrated that reason could not give us knowledge; and by Kant, who agreed in a sense and added the even more intolerable conclusion that the “truth” gained by knowledge was entirely different from things as they are “in-themselves.” And since it is almost a tautology to say, as Aristotle said, that “to say of what is, that it is, is true,” Kant seemed to be saying the absurd (as Hegel would soon point out) that a belief can be “true” even if it has no relation whatever to the way things are “in-themselves.”

The concept of “reason” takes a shift in Hegel’s philosophy of no less significance than does the concept of “truth.” Hegel is often said to be a “rationalist,” and in opposition to the romantics and intuitionists of his day that contrast makes a good deal of sense. But Hegel is anything but a “rationalist” in the sense attacked (as Hegel’s own) by Bertrand Russell in the first years of this century, as the bloodless logician who thought that nothing existed but thoughts, and that human life was essentially nothing but reason—that is, the manipulation of concepts which applied, perhaps, to nothing whatsoever. What Hegel means by “Reason” is not a strictly intellectual faculty—“the ability to do sums” quipped Lord Russell in a context in which he was more knowledgeable. Reason means “purposive activity” and thus is to be found in the very nature of intentional actions of all kinds; indeed, Hegel even equates it with the inner forces of life itself.

Reason is the purposive activity of which truth is the goal. An event is *rational* if it serves some purpose, attains some ideal. Thus in his early works Hegel argued that a religion would be rational if it served the purpose of morality. Morality in turn is rational if it serves the

purpose of communal spirit—unifies a *Volk* instead of tearing them apart. The universe as a whole is rational, as Kant argued tentatively in his third *Critique*, if it too is approaching some ideal, serving some purpose, realizing some internal goal. And the *Phenomenology* is a book whose purpose is to show us, in effect, the rationality of the universe, the purpose and meaning of human life as a whole. Reason, as Hegel defined it in his *Differenz*-essay of 1801, is the demand for unity. Putting the two definitions together, we can conclude that, for Hegel, reason is the aim of the universe to unify itself. And since he accepts the image of the age of the universe as essentially “Spirit” unfolding itself, through nature, through history and through human consciousness, it followed for him (as for Aristotle and, more immediately, Hölderlin) that it would be through a select particular human consciousness, perhaps even a Swabian assistant professor at Jena, that this cosmic urge would finally attain its full realization.

The desire to find a purpose for the universe, and reasons for everything in it, sounds odd to us, with our uncompromising sense of contingency; but in Hegel’s time, this would have been virtually a matter of common sense. It was a desire that had its formal expression in Leibniz’s *Principle of Sufficient Reason* (whatever happens, God has a reason for it), but it had its roots in the whole of Western science—its presupposition that the universe was rational and orderly—and in religion too—in the presumption that God has done everything for the best. (Indeed, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is sometimes called a “*theodicy*”—the justification of the ways of God on earth.)

“Reason” and “rationality” refer both to that conscious ability to think abstractly and reach ultimate (“Absolute”) truth and to the existence of *reasons for* something. Notice that Hegel does not distinguish between there *being* reasons for and our *finding* reasons for something; so long as the latter fit together in the over-all picture there is no difference between them. The reasons, after all, are ultimately *our* reasons, and there is no difference, he would insist, between our *having* a reason and there *being* a reason, which is not at all to say that we always *know* those reasons. That is why we need the *Phenomenology*. (The unconscious was alive and well in German philosophy years before Freud, as he himself was the first to acknowledge.)

Notice too that Hegel does not distinguish, as Kant does, between practical reason and theoretical reason. Following Fichte, Hegel denied this distinction and in the *Phenomenology* defends the thesis that reasons for knowledge are, at least in part, practical reasons. Certain parts of the *Phenomenology* lend themselves to characterization as

“theoretical,” others as “practical,” but it is essential not to make too much of this division. What we believe is part and parcel of what we do, and Hegel’s continued insistence on the “rationality of Spirit,” which is one formulation of the over-all goal of the *Phenomenology*, means *both* that Spirit is the abstract faculty of theoretical reason and finding reasons, *and* that there is purpose in Spirit’s activities. Indeed, these ultimately are the same, in Hegel as in Aristotle, for the grand purpose in the existence of Spirit is its recognition of its own reasons for being and, finally, the realization of its total unity.

The Problem of Knowledge and the Obviousness of Idealism

Weary of dogmatism, which teaches us nothing, and of scepticism, which does not even promise us anything—even the quiet state of a contented ignorance—disquieted by the importance of knowledge so much needed, and rendered suspicious by long experience of so much knowledge which we believe we possess or which offers itself in the name of pure reason, there remains but one critical question on the answer to which our future depends, namely “is Metaphysics at all possible?” How is knowledge from pure reason possible?
—Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*

Hegel says that his goal is “philosophical truth,” but what he talks about for the most part is *knowledge*. The book begins, for example, with our most naïve form of knowledge (“sense certainty”) and ends, notably, with “absolute knowing.” In a simple-minded, common-sense way, we might say that *truth* is *what* we know, and *knowledge* is our recognition of it; or we might say that the truth is “the facts” and “the things in themselves” while our knowing is a conscious activity that somehow (through the senses, through our use of God-given Reason, through mystical intuition) “grasps” and articulates the truth. But this simple-minded, common-sense distinction will not do; first of all, because Kant had built an unbreachable wall between knowledge (or “understanding”), which had to do with the objects constituted by experience, and “the things in themselves,” which we could not know at all. And second, Kant’s formidable apparatus aside, the suggestion that truth is simply “there,” independent of our cognitive activities, and the image of consciousness “grasping for” the truth, like a drunk in the dark, lead inevitably—or so says Hegel—to the intolerable conclusion that truth and knowledge are quite distinct, in separate phil-

osophical realms, the former ultimately inaccessible to the latter. Thus, for Hegel, truth and knowledge must be, in some sense, one and the same thing, indistinguishable even in theory.

On the one hand, Hegel sees that any hint of a distinction between truth or "things in themselves" and knowledge or "our faculty for grasping the truth" will lead inevitably to that philosophical bogeyman, *scepticism*. And this he considers an absurdity. But on the other hand, one cannot deny the common-sense idea, which is the first stage of the *Phenomenology*, that "the truth is for consciousness something other than itself." His answer, of course, is the Kantian answer, that consciousness "determines" (from *bestimmen*, like Kant's "constitutes") its objects as other than itself, but this is an answer that sounds plausible only while we are immersed in the philosophy of the period. Taking a step out of the study, walking with Hume to the billiard table, for instance, the very idea seems absurd, a bit of insanity. But once again, we have to look at "the problem of knowledge," like the "problem of truth," not as an immediate puzzlement but rather as a long development, starting from common sense but ultimately involving the whole history of conceptual thinking about knowledge and truth.

The specific steps from common-sense certainty to the Kantian view take up the introduction and first several chapters of the *Phenomenology*, and we will discuss them at length in Chapters 6 and 7. But we can encapsulate Hegel's analysis in a few paragraphs, at least enough to show how his view of "phenomenology" and "absolute knowing" is an answer to both the problem of Truth ("What is Truth?") and the problem of knowledge ("How can we know the Truth?") which turn out to be, for the post-Kantian idealist, exactly the same question.

Hegel's whole approach to these epistemological questions turns on two presumptions that he shared with almost every other thinker of his times, indeed, with most philosophers today too. The first is that knowledge begins with experience, that our contact with the truth is in some sense by way of consciousness. The most dramatic and explicit statement of this position, of course, begins with Descartes's famous *cogito*—"I think, therefore I am"—from which he attempts to derive the whole edifice of his knowledge about God and the "external" world. But one can perform major surgery on the Cartesian position, removing the "I" and radically altering what is meant by "think" and "am" as well, without killing the position itself. Hegel and Kant are both often treated as antagonists of Cartesianism, but regarding this basic starting point, it never would have occurred to either of

them to question it. Thus the *Phenomenology* begins, like the first *Critique*, with the declaration that, in Kant's words, "all knowledge begins with experience." "Science" (i.e. Hegel's philosophy) is "the Science of the *experience of consciousness*" (*Phenomenology*, 88).

The second presumption is Hegel's common-sensical insistence that scepticism is an absurdity, not a position worth refuting, not a position worth considering, no matter how persuasive the arguments. Indeed, the very suggestion that we might not know the world as it is "in-itself" is, for Hegel, sufficient to throw into question the whole system of thinking that could produce such an absurdity. For most of the history of philosophy, therefore, Hegel sees an enormous problem, some gigantic underlying confusion that must be taken care of before the *Phenomenology* even begins. And even in Kant's philosophy, which Hegel considers to be the final answer to the sceptic, there is still the residual "thing-in-itself," distinct from the objects of our experience, which introduces the possibility of a new scepticism. Thus, following Fichte, Hegel eliminates this too, not by denying that we can know "things-in-themselves,"—which would be precisely the sceptical reply—but by insisting that the objects of our experience *are* the "things-in-themselves." The only question, then, is not whether our knowledge conforms to the "things-in-themselves" (or "the Absolute"), but rather whether our knowledge is an adequate set of "determinations" and a comprehensible view of what it is that we know. In Hegel's jargon, "absolute knowing" is the ultimately adequate way of knowing the Absolute. The most adequate theory of knowledge is one that (a) does not even raise the question whether we know things as they really are and (b) can account for our experience in the best way possible. But this last claim needs a proviso: Hegel and the post-Kantian idealists are not, like the self-consciously "common-sense idealists" of the Enlightenment, trying merely to recapture everyday certainties in philosophical theories. They are also trying to reform our more ordinary experience into something spectacular, so that even the most mundane activities begin to take on the conceptual glow of the grand metaphor that permeates Hegel's whole philosophy, borrowed directly from Hölderlin, in which every experience is an expression of the human Spirit, writ large, manifesting and realizing itself through each of us.

A poet, however, can state such a metaphor baldly, as a metaphor, an inspiration, an imaginative vision; from a philosopher, the same statement seems to be nonsense, however familiar it may have been at the time. Thus Hegel insists on "demonstrating" the truth of this metaphor, and his way of doing so is the very unpoetic strategy of re-

examining the problems of knowledge and truth as they have emerged and become submerged in philosophy, in Kant's philosophy in particular. He begins with the two unquestionable presumptions: that knowledge begins with experience and that scepticism is an unthinkable absurdity, and he then goes on to show how Hölderlin's vision ultimately follows as philosophical Truth.

If knowledge begins with experience, then either the objects we claim to know are themselves "in" experience, or else they are not. If they are not, then the argument belongs to the sceptic, who will have no trouble, at every step, arguing that we can never know if indeed our experiences "correspond" to the objects themselves. But scepticism is absurd, according to Hegel. It follows that objects of knowledge must be wholly within the realm of consciousness. Thus, given this choice of positions, *idealism*—the view that objects are in some sense "in" or dependent on consciousness—becomes the *obvious* preference. But one still must account for the fact that objects seem to be "other than consciousness," "outside of us, in the world" and this is where Kant comes in with his theory of "constitution." And one must still explain the fact that there seem to be aspects of consciousness which are not dependent on our activities but apparently "given" to us; Kant explains this by reference to the things themselves "outside of experience," which cause us to have sensations which we then organize into objects of knowledge *in* consciousness. But Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel consider this just so much double-talk; either the objects we determine are the objects themselves, or they are not. If they are not, the sceptic re-emerges, which is intolerable. So the objects we determine are the *only* objects, and the sensations which seem to be caused in us must in fact be a product of conscious activity too. But since it is obvious that we do not *individually* produce sensations in ourselves (which would be another absurdity), it must be the case that they are produced by some agency *inside* of us (rather than by objects "in themselves" outside of us). But it is also obvious that all of us (or at least, almost all) have (more or less) the same kinds of experiences and experience the same objects, which means that the inner agency that produces our experiences must be a *universal* agency, common to all of us. And here, of course, is Hegel's "Spirit," Hölderlin's Absolute, defended not as a poetic image but as the inescapable conclusion of a series of arguments beginning with the apparently indisputable presumption that knowledge begins with experience and the refusal to take scepticism seriously, together with the most obvious facts of human experience, namely, that we all seem to experience more or less the same objects and we do not individually produce our experiences

at will. Idealism, in some sense to be refined, becomes an obvious solution to the problems of truth and knowledge.

IDEALISM AND A NOTE ON THE NEW PHYSICS

What we perceive to be physical reality is actually our cognitive construction of it. —Gary Zukov, *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters*³⁴

Idealism is the view that reality depends on our ideas. An idealist need not believe that objects *are* ideas (the “subjective idealism” of Bishop George Berkeley) or that objects are thereby the product of our individual minds (even George Berkeley, as well as Leibniz, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, insisted that objects are not dependent on our particular minds but on some universal mind, God or “spirit”). Indeed, on Hegel’s version, what idealism (or “absolute idealism”) ultimately comes down to is the rejection of the distinctions between mind and matter, experience and reality, consciousness and its objects, knowledge and truth. And this follows, through something like the argument we have sketched above, from the two innocent presumptions, that knowledge begins with experience and that scepticism is absurd.

Idealism seems most absurd when confronting a physical object; the great Dr. Johnson thought that he had refuted Berkeley by kicking a stone. Thus there is some philosophical as well as poetic justice in the fact that physics, so long the last refuge of materialists and determinists, has come around to the Hegelian idealist position. “To be is to be observed” has become almost a platitude in the circles of the new physics, according to John Wheeler, who for years worked with Einstein at Princeton. “It was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way without reference to consciousness,” writes the physics Nobel-laureate Eugene Wigner in his “Remarks on the Mind-Body Question,” and he concludes with an ironic remark to the effect that the physical study of the world may have led us to conclude that the content of consciousness itself is the ultimate reality.

Several popular writers (F. Capra in *The Tao of Physics* and Gary Zukov in *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters*) have pointed out the affinities between the new physics and the more spiritual speculations of the Eastern mystics, but more important if less exotic is the resemblance of the new theories of quantum mechanics to some of our own “Western” philosophers, who at the time seemed to be fighting a losing

34. *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters* (New York: Morrow, 1979), p. 105.

battle against the forces of Newtonian mechanics. But if the Newtonian view of “absolute space and time” held sway for a while, the more Leibnizian-Kantian-Hegelian view that space and time are strictly “relative” to the observer has now become almost unchallengable, and the physicist Werner Heisenberg has gone so far as to claim that space and time are nothing but “the contents of our minds.” Hegel’s utter rejection of any distinction between consciousness and its objects is supported by John Wheeler, who writes—

May the universe in some strange sense be ‘brought into being’ by the participation of those who participate? . . . The vital act is the act of participation. ‘Participator’ is the incontrovertible new concept given by quantum mechanics. It strikes down the term ‘observer’ of classical theory, the man who stands safely behind the thick glass wall and watches what goes on without taking part. It can’t be done, quantum mechanics says.³⁵

Hegel’s idealism in general, his view that there is no physical world apart from the determinations of human consciousness, is stated in even stronger terms by the physicist Henry Stapp:

If the attitude of quantum mechanics is correct, in the strong sense that a description of the substructure underlying experience more complete than the one it provides is not possible, then there is no substantive physical world, in the usual sense of this term. The conclusion here is not the weak conclusion that there *may* not be a substantive physical world but rather that there definitely is not a substantive physical world.³⁶

One might well picture Hegel’s spirit, having weathered two centuries of scientific materialism, chuckling absolutely at this latest turn of events. Idealism has now become the “truth” of materialism, and consciousness, the starting point of physical knowledge, now seems to have also become its conclusion.

“The Absolute”

Every man has his own truth,
Yet truth is one.
—Goethe

What is “the Absolute”? On the one hand, it means nothing more than “reality”—that is, the world as it is “in itself”—and Hegel’s de-

35. John Wheeler, *Gravitation* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1973), p. 1273, quoted in Zukov.

36. Henry Stapp, from “Mind, Matter and Quantum Mechanics,” quoted in Zukov, p. 105.

mand for “absolute knowledge” thus becomes no more than the common-sense insistence that what we know is indeed real, not a dream, not a mere swarm of sensations and ideas, not a mere construction of consciousness which may or may not correspond to the way things really are. On the other hand, “the Absolute” is too pretentious a word not to carry with it the most profound suggestions of divinity. So, “the Absolute” refers to reality; and it can refer to God or, in Hegel, “Spirit.” And much of the problem for most American and English philosophers consists in the systematic conflation of these two meanings, which, in Hegel and Hölderlin in particular, is precisely the point. God is nothing other than reality, but reality itself should be experienced in the exciting quasi-religious terms of absolute Spirit, infusing everything.

“Absolute” also means “unqualified” or “unconditioned.” In a perfectly ordinary sense, knowledge cannot be absolute unless it is free from “conditions”—for example, not an attempt to please the pope or prime minister or to publish in a certain prestigious professional journal. Knowledge cannot be “absolute” unless it does not depend on a particular cultural or intellectual context, in other words, unless it is simply “true,” rather than mere personal opinions, provincial biases, or just another philosophical viewpoint. But in addition to these minimal negative requirements, the concept of “the Absolute” and absolute knowledge also includes a more problematic set of demands which have emerged throughout the history of philosophy—indeed they are to be found even in the Greek pre-Socratic philosophers—but which found their definitive formulation (by 1800) in Kant. The Absolute, the unconditioned, had to be “boundless,” infinite, unaffected by anything “outside” of itself. For Kant, therefore, objects of knowledge were irreducibly “conditioned” by objects “in themselves” affecting our senses, but the objects “in themselves,” known immediately only by God, would be “unconditioned.” What followed, of course, was that we were incapable of knowing the Absolute; only God could know that. Then too, Kant insisted that the Absolute, the unconditioned, must be utterly undivided, “unmediated,” unlike his division of the realms of human life into cognitive and practical realms. Again, only God could know these as a unity; for us, this ultimate unity could be only a matter of rational faith, an ideal but not knowledge.

The conclusion, that we cannot know the Absolute, cannot know the world “in itself,” struck most of Kant’s followers and critics as unacceptable. What they did accept was the basic Kantian argument, that absolute knowledge could not be “conditioned” by either the senses or by the fixed concepts of the understanding, and so, in one set of

bold moves, Jacobi, Schleiermacher, and Schelling, among many others, advanced the conclusion that the Absolute could not be known through concepts at all. Hegel's whole argument, on the other hand, is that the Absolute can be known and it "can be grasped only through the Concept."

Insofar as "absolute knowledge" means "knowing the Absolute," i.e. knowing reality as it is "in itself," Hegel's search is unobjectionable, even part and parcel of common sense, however formidable the terminology. But for Hegel and the idealists, reality "in itself" includes, in fact is based upon, consciousness, and so the ideal of "absolute knowing" also means recognizing reality as (in some sense) determined by consciousness, through concepts. This thesis is surely peculiar to common sense, but nevertheless, it follows from the tenets of idealism in general, as we have already argued. The problem with "absolute knowledge" becomes apparent, however, when we see that Hegel wants to claim much more than the reasonable proposal that we know reality through our concepts. He is not just talking about knowledge *of* the Absolute; he is also talking about a special *kind* of knowledge, which itself is absolute. It is one thing to say, as the Greeks too said long ago, that reality—whatever it is—is *everything*; it is something else to say that our *knowledge* of reality can be unlimited. Since the Greeks, this special kind of knowledge has received a special name—*nous* or "intellectual intuition." Indeed, it is *nous* that Kant grants to God, and *nous* that Jacobi and Schelling claim for themselves. But Hegel will not have this. For him, the unconditioned must be "grasped through the Concept."

This would seem to be undermined by Hegel's own arguments. Concepts are by their very nature "mediating"; they create oppositions and distinctions. They divide up and give certain form to their subject matter. They are always context-bound, tied to other concepts through language and (though Hegel is ambiguous on this) bound to particular cultural contexts and experiences—"forms of consciousness." Of course, one can increasingly empty certain concepts of all content or fill them with everything—which similarly deprives them of their concrete usefulness. Then we emerge with that set of categories and "ideas" which in Kant's philosophy represent the conceptual limits of all experience. But insofar as these concepts have any determinate content, by Hegel's own insistence, they are also divisive and "mediating"; they condition our knowledge. And this means that the only "unconditioned" concepts are wholly empty, or wholly full, with which we can assert nothing at all. Indeed, this again is the source of Hegel's jibe at Schelling, "the night in which all cows are black";

what does one say by asserting “reality is everything” or “all is one”? Absolute knowing, therefore, becomes a strictly negative set of requirements—*not* divided, *not* affected from the outside, *not* context-bound, *not* dependent on the senses. “The Absolute” sounds like a spectacular philosophical object, but as “reality” (lower-case “r”) it loses something of its glamour. Insofar as “absolute knowing” means simply knowing reality, it is something quite ordinary, indeed (as Hegel reminds his philosophical colleagues) it is something most animals seem to possess at least as much as many philosophers. Insofar as “absolute knowing” is the mere philosophical facility to know that one knows reality, Hegel’s “Absolute” has a bit more substance (*vis-à-vis* the sceptics, for instance) but it still deserves less than the star-status it has often received. Insofar as “absolute knowing” is supposed to mean “knowing reality unconditionally,” however, the historicist Hegelian conclusion (versus the absolutist Hegelian conclusion) must be that there is no such possibility. We might know absolutely that what we know is reality (at least, after reading certain philosophical treatises) but we know reality only within a particular intellectual, cultural, and linguistic context, never “unconditionally.” Our concept of reality might be unconditional, but only insofar as it is wholly uninformative (as in “Reality is”, a derivative Gertrude Steinism). Apart from such empty claims, *there are no context-free knowledge claims*. (Indeed, doesn’t “Reality is” depend on certain concepts and grammatical oddities of English and the verb “to be” not found in many other languages?) What is “grasped through the Concept” is the realization that all forms of consciousness are part of the same grand tapestry of human experience, different perspectives of the same reality, which has no existence or form apart from those perspectives and that tapestry of experience. What is unconditional—if anything is—is our sense that it makes no sense to deny that what we know is reality. But reality itself and our knowledge of it is always “conditioned.” Hegel sometimes suggests that the Absolute is an ideal, but it is an *impossible* ideal, despite the fact that he claims to have actually achieved it at the end of the *Phenomenology*. One might turn around and call this knowledge that there is no unconditional knowledge “absolute knowing”, but that is just playing with paradox.³⁷ And when Hegel finishes off the *Phenomenology* with just such a paradox, we might say that his academic

37. Paradoxes regarding universal claims have always been the favorite source of inspiration to logicians, inspiring such works of genius as Russell’s theory of types and Gödel’s incompleteness proof—not to mention the puzzles of Lewis Carroll. For example, one says, innocently enough, “Don’t believe anything I say in this book . . .,” and the game is started. The metaphysical version, unfortunately, is not so neat and elegant, and lends itself more to obscurity than to crisp paradoxes as such.

expectations got the better of his historicist insights. In the end, "the Absolute" is just a word.³⁸

FROM THE ABSOLUTE TO ABSOLUTE RELATIVISM: THE WORLD AS CONTRADICTION

All this is in some sense true, as it is in some ways false. —St. Augustine

Between the innocent sense of "knowing the Absolute" as the claim that we do in fact know reality as it really is, and the not at all innocent sense of "absolute knowing" as a divine standpoint, without limits or conditions, there is a much more concrete and useful conception of "Absolute", which is much more than common-sense realism but thankfully less than the tedious metaphysical disputes concerning "the All." In this sense, "absolute knowledge" means "unconditioned" in the straightforward sense we mentioned before, "unconditioned" by any *particular* set of experiences, not restricted to some strictly *personal* perspectives, not context-bound to any particular culture or world-view. And in this sense, most philosophers have been "spokesmen for the Absolute," insofar as they claimed to be saying something true of reality, or human consciousness, *as such*, rather than simply expressing the peculiarities of the French, or English, or Javanese mind. It is certainly noteworthy that the strongest claims of this kind in modern times appeared when and where they did, made by German writers who, for the most part, had never even visited Berlin, much less Paris or any of the more exotic anthropological climates of the world. The claim to "absolute knowledge" is, on this reading, the transcendental pretense that one can, even in a provincial town in Württemberg, reach out and grasp the nature of reality, unbiased and "unconditioned" by the limitations of one's education and experience.

If the claim to "absolute knowledge" is a claim about the only possible view that one can hold about the nature of reality and human experience, it is obviously false, since Hegel himself shows us several dozen viewpoints which are not absolute (even if, in his words, they frequently "imply" the absolute viewpoint). If Hegel is claiming instead that this is the logical outcome of the whole tradition of "Western" philosophy, and in particular the Cartesian insistence on the pri-

38. In answer to such objections to "the Absolute," James Ogilvy has suggested that "the Absolute" must include the concept of its own incompleteness, thus calling up a number of familiar theological paradoxes in addition to the paradoxes of totality mentioned above. See his "Reflections on the Absolute," *Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 28, no. 3 (March 1975).

macy of consciousness, I think the claim is at least arguable, perhaps even true. But what Hegel has in mind, I think, is not so much a view of reality (as spirit manifesting itself through each of us and determining the world through its concepts, etc.) as a *view about views*. In other words, what “absolute knowledge” amounts to is the view that reality can be comprehended only through the totality of different viewpoints—indeed, reality consists wholly of the totality of viewpoints. But this could also mean that there is no single “correct” viewpoint (except the viewpoint that there is no single “correct” viewpoint). Some viewpoints inevitably are going to be mutually contradictory, which means that even though they are recognized as equally legitimate views of reality, they cannot be reconciled, cannot be made compatible. They co-exist, at best, in their mutual recognition of their equal validity. Ideally, Hegel hopes, there is an underlying structure that renders them all compatible. More likely, they remain convinced of the utter falsehood of the other. This nest of conflicting views and contradictions, taken all together, is the Absolute.

The above is one way of stating Hegel’s most famous single claim—that *the world itself is contradictory*, but philosophy, through reason, is capable of reconciling such contradictions. But the first part of the claim is misleading, at best, while the second part is inaccurate, at least.

A simple way of putting the problem is to say that if, as Hegel argues, there is no reality apart from consciousness, then reality is *relative* to consciousness, that is, defined by the concepts through which we conceive of it. But since people can and do conceive of the world in radically different ways, it would seem to follow either that reality itself is contradictory or that there are different realities. If “the Truth” (*die Wahrheit*, “philosophical” or “Absolute” Truth) means a total comprehensiveness which includes all possible viewpoints, if all “forms of consciousness” have their own truth (*das Wahre*), then the Truth must in some sense consist of contradictory truths. Ironically, if “the Absolute” is Hegel’s guarantee that there can be no separation of reality and consciousness, the conclusion seems to be that reality is relative to consciousness and—the whole of traditional metaphysics aside—that there may be *no* single way the world *really* is, after all.

Two standard replies have been provided for Hegel, although neither of them is actually his own. The first is to insist that his “Absolute” does resolve these various contradictions by showing how each side is in fact a “one-sided” view of the matter; the second is to hold that, despite the horror of the logicians, Hegel accepts the conclusion that it is the world, and not only our opinions about it, that is contradictory. Contradictions, in other words, are real and “in the world.”

The first reply is eminently reasonable, but it saves Hegel's "Absolute" only by denying its claim to be all inclusive. There may or may not be a viewpoint in which contradictions are resolved, and one may or may not find it in the last chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. But Hegel's claim is that his philosophy *includes* the contradictions, *as* contradictions, even if what he *also* gives us is a viewpoint (which is not, he would insist, merely *a* viewpoint) from which we can understand both sides and see beyond them. Contradictions are real, and what follows is that the Absolute, if it is not to degenerate into simple-minded pluralism ("all views are true"), must include contradictory views of the world, a contradictory world.

The second reply is eminently absurd. Consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds, as one neo-Hegelian wit has written, but flat-out contradiction is another matter. Aristotle stated the definitive objection to it in his *Metaphysics*, 2500 years before Hegel:

. . . it is impossible for anyone to suppose that the same thing is and is not . . . then clearly it is impossible for the same man to suppose at the same time that the same thing is and is not; for the man who made this error would entertain two contrary opinions at the same time. Hence all men who are demonstrating anything refer back to this as an ultimate belief; for it is by nature the starting-point of all the other axioms as well.

Some, indeed, demand to have the law proved, but this is because they lack education; for it shows lack of education not to know of what we should require proof, and of what we should not. For it is quite impossible that everything should have a proof; the process would go on to infinity, so that even so there would be no proof. If on the other hand there are some things of which no proof need be sought, they cannot say what principle they think to be more self-evident. Even in the case of this law, however, we can demonstrate the impossibility of refutation, if only our opponent makes some statement. If he makes none, it is absurd to seek for an argument against one who has no arguments of his own about anything, in so far as he has none; for such a person, in so far as he is such, is really no better than a vegetable.³⁹

Hegel has to accept the existence of contradictions in the world and, as a consequence of his own thesis that consciousness and reality cannot be distinguished, he will have to accept the idea that the world itself is contradictory, or that there is no single world. But this does not mean that he accepts contradictions, the intelligibility of one and the same proposition being both true and false. Neither is he simply dismissing contradictions as misunderstandings, that is, thinking a

39. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. H. Tredennick (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1933), Bk. IV.

proposition is both true and false because of different meanings, different interpretations, different perspectives. He cannot simply reject contradictory viewpoints; neither can he simply accept them. The key to this paradox, obviously, is in the word “simply.”

The age-old insistence on consistency should itself be subjected to a certain sceptical examination, and indeed, since Hegel, it has. Walt Whitman once wrote,

So I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself.
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

He was a poet, and so no champion of consistency. But then we read Ludwig Wittgenstein, in 1930, writing that “I predict a time when there will be mathematical investigations of calculi containing contradictions, and people will actually be proud of having emancipated themselves from consistency.”

And very recently there has been a powerful movement within the realm of logic itself, with its poles oddly placed between Pittsburgh and Melbourne, Australia, which has developed just such a logic (or rather, logics) of inconsistency. Richard Routley, in Melbourne, Nicholas Rescher and Robert Brandom in Pittsburgh, together with David Lewis at Princeton (a regular visitor at Melbourne) have developed a “logic of inconsistency”—what Lewis calls “a logic for equivocators”—which includes the possibility of real contradictions, and the rejection of both “the law of the excluded middle” (“a proposition is either true or false”) and “the law of contradiction” (“a proposition cannot be both true and false”).⁴⁰ One central insight is that propositions (statements, beliefs, or views) are always *context-dependent* or, in slightly different language, *relevance-dependent*. The techniques are formidable, but the outcome is clear: that Hegel’s idea that reality can be contradictorily and truly described—which is to say that reality itself can truly be said to be contradictory—is at least an intelligible thesis.

It may still be the case that *no* proposition can be said to be both true and false in the same context at the same time, but the whole point of Hegel’s “dialectic” is to make the point that we are very rarely in the same context when serious conceptual disputes emerge. Dilthey summarized the point some years later,

40. For what I understand of these “logics of inconsistency,” I am indebted to Robert Nola (Auckland University) and, especially, David K. Lewis. Texts I have consulted are: Nicholas Rescher and Robert Brandom, *The Logic of Inconsistency* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Richard Routley, *Exploring Meinong’s Jungle and Beyond* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1980), and David K. Lewis, “Logic for Equivocators” (*Nous*, forthcoming).

It was to Hegel's credit that in his logic he tried to express the restless stream of events. But he was mistaken when he thought that this could not be reconciled with the principle of contradiction . . .⁴¹

To say that "a proposition cannot be both true and false at the same time (in the same context)" is not to say very much; indeed, it is the limitation of that long-standing absolute claim and the extreme restrictions and qualifications that are required to make it always turn out to be true that provoke the more radical logical investigation of contradiction. And this is the subject matter as well as the "method" of the *Phenomenology*.

What Hegel is arguing is, I believe, a thesis that seems to us quite plausible, but which must have seemed like an absurdity—on a par with scepticism—to him. The thesis is what we call "relativism," which means in the innocent sense the thesis that reality is relative to our ways of conceiving of it. This is the shared belief of all idealists, however, and it is wholly compatible with the insistence that there is but one possible way of conceiving of the world (for example, one set of categories, as in Kant, or one single-minded underlying world-spirit, as in Schelling). The innocent sense gives way to a more polemical sense when one allows, with Fichte and Hegel, the possibility that there is a variety of ways of conceiving of the world, for then we seem forced to the conclusion that there may be a variety of worlds, and no single world, "in itself," at all. This polemical sense suggests a vulgar non-sense—a perennial favorite among undergraduates nonetheless—that different opinions are equally true, equally valid, and need have nothing whatever to do with one another. Hegel utterly rejects this vulgar view; he accepts the innocent sense but he is of mixed opinions about the second, more polemical sense. As an "absolute idealist" with the ambition of turning Kant into a "system," it is incumbent upon him to demonstrate the single unity of all the various forms of human experience. But as a phenomenologist and a dialectician, an enthusiast for the variety of forms of experience, he finds himself increasingly drawn to the conclusion that there are any number of ways to view the world, each of them seemingly self-contained if not ultimately adequate, and that no view has the ability to replace all the others. Moreover, some views will forever be at odds with each other even if (as Hegel shows) they could not exist without one another. As an absolute idealist, Hegel has to show that contradictions are only apparent, that there is, after all, a single coherent view of the

41. Wilhelm Dilthey: *Selected Writings*, trans. H.P. Richman (Cambridge, 1970), p. 200. Quoted by Rescher and Brandom, p. i. Same source for Wittgenstein and Whithman quotes above.

world; as a dialectician, he sees the need to recognize the reality of these contradictions. And because he also believes that the views we have of the world determine the world, he also sees the need to recognize the reality of these different *worlds* (in his words, “changes in the Concept are at the same time changes in its object”).⁴²

This is not simply confusion; it is *brilliant* confusion (as Hegel commented on a similar topic in Kant). What Hegel has discovered is the real significance of Kant’s revolution, what it means to say that we determine the world through our concepts. For what this means is that the idea of a single, unified, determinate world is itself but a single ideal, a bit of philosophical wishful thinking, and that the obvious facts of human life show us quite clearly (especially in 1806) that the world is in chaos, that contradiction is not just a philosopher’s problem but manifest as well in the reality of the international situation, the state of scientific knowledge, the newest paradoxes in morality and religion. And yet, one can, from a philosophical point of view, appreciate nevertheless the unity of all this confusion. The Absolute, finally, is that momentary comprehension of the whole cosmic struggle, the simultaneous appreciation for the enormous variety of human forms of experience, which one can at most hope might be brought into some mutual recognition and understanding. Thus J. N. Findlay finally calls Hegel’s philosophy a “relative Absolutism,” but I would rather say, an *absolute relativism*—the utter impossibility of denying an irreducible plurality of possible human experiences and, consequently, possible human worlds. But Hegel himself couldn’t even consider this conclusion, and though he established it more brilliantly than anyone ever has in his *Phenomenology*, he felt compelled to deny it with his unproven appeal to the Absolute, that ideal conceptual harmony that was so visibly absent in finite human affairs. After Dorothy’s discovery, the Wizard still had a career to carry on.

Spirit and Self-Identity

Thus it can be said that the best statement of the fundamental project of human reality is that being which aims to become God.
—Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

The subject matter of the *Phenomenology*, from its title to its closing quotation from Schiller, is *Spirit*, *Geist*. Spirit and Absolute are the same, as the “all,” and Hegel sometimes talks of “absolute Spirit.” Now

42. See, for example, Rescher and Brandom, Sect. 17.

it is undeniable that "spirit" has inescapable religious connotations, and in the *Logic*, Hegel openly equates *Geist* (and "the Idea") with God. In Hölderlin's grand metaphor, "Spirit" or "the Absolute" clearly refers to a divine source that is more than human, even if its ultimate expression is a few human poets. But the suggestion of divinity must not distract us from the most essential feature of Hegel's *Geist*, namely, that it is ultimately the *human* spirit, the spirit of *humanity*.

One might, say, with a quick qualification, that "Spirit" is the "subject" side of the Absolute. (The qualification, of course, is that subject and object are ultimately identical, and Hegel elsewhere refers to them respectively as "subjective Subject-Object" and "objective Subject-Object.") Spirit is the consciousness that knows itself, and so every twist and turn in the history of philosophy regarding knowledge and truth is at the same time a twist and turn in our conception of ourselves. Thus the history of philosophy is also a kind of auto-biography, a *Bildung* in which humanity as whole comes to understand itself. The *Phenomenology* is essentially our collective memoirs, clarifying finally what we now find that we are. So viewed, the *Phenomenology* is a treatise on *self-identity*, what each of us, and all of us, ought to think of ourselves.

There is another metaphor here, mixed sometimes uncomfortably with the *Bildung* metaphor, which has long played an important role in German philosophy. It is the image of the self as a self-enclosed unity, reaching out to the world but never really getting outside of itself. For the sociable French, this was considered "the egocentric predicament"; for the amiable English and Americans, the same image was considered an ultimate absurdity, called "solipsism." But in Germany, it has been taken very seriously from Leibniz to Freud, Husserl, and modern hermeneutics. The classic example of the view is Leibniz's conception of *monads*, self-enclosed entelechies "without windows to the outside." All perceptions of "the world" are in fact contained within. All relationships are perceptions, and *Bildung* is not a matter of going out into the world (for there is no world to go out into) but an internal unfolding of a pre-established, well-coordinated harmony established by God (who is also a Monad.) Freud uses the same image in a more biological way, viewing the self as an amoeba (for example, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*) which is originally wholly self-contained until it is forced to confront the "outside" world, with which it then tries to identify by incorporating it into itself.⁴³ The great poets of Germany, Goethe in particular, em-

43. The comparison of Freud and Hegel has been developed at some length by Paul Ricoeur in his *Freud*, trans. D. Savage (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), p. 459ff. See also Clark Butler, "Hegel and Freud," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*,

ployed this image too—thus the standard structure of the so-called *Bildungsroman* (Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, for example) is the isolated individual who reaches out and travels around the world, only to come home and “find” himself at the end. It is, of course, a very Christian image too—that one finds one's true self only by first losing it, and M.H. Abrams argues that it is this same image again that defines the whole romantic movement in Germany—the self dividing against itself and coming back to itself.⁴⁴

The philosophical use of this metaphor closest to Hegel, however, was Fichte's philosophy; the first realization of philosophy is the “intuition” of one's self, which Fichte confusingly describes (following Kant) as “the identity of the self with itself” or “ego-ego.” But, Fichte argues (none too clearly), this recognition of self would not be possible except in opposition to the “external world,” the “other,” the not-self (or “Ego = not-not-Ego.”). Finally, there is the ultimate philosophical realization that it is the ego that itself “posits” (“sets up,” from *setzen*) the non-ego as a way of realizing itself, to which Hegel objects (in his *Differenz*-essay of 1801) that Fichte never really has the self coming back to itself, but retains the perpetual tension between the self and the not-self. Schelling corrects this (according to Hegel in the same essay) by *identifying* the two, and making the not-self (or Nature) part of the self (or vice versa). But the image remains essentially the same. (This was Reinhold's criticism of Schelling, which prompted Hegel's essay.) It is the image of the self, reaching out *through* the world—in nature, in human history, and in human consciousness—and coming to realize (or struggling to realize) all of this as its own activity.

Hegel's and Hölderlin's “Spirit” is this image. Hegel's whole philosophy can be viewed (and he so views it) as an attempt to “realize” this universal permeation of spirit. It is not always clear to what extent the image is the humble Vedic vision of losing ourselves in a force much greater than ourselves—in “the All”—and to what extent it is the ego-maniacal image of the self as everything. But in Fichte, and in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, there seems to be little question that the emphasis is more toward the ego-maniacal image.⁴⁵ Despite his perfunctory inclusion of a short “philosophy of nature” in chapter 5, the whole thrust of the book is a demonstration of the strictly *human* con-

vol. 36 (June 1976); and Darrel Christensen, “Hegel's Phenomenological Analysis and Freud's Psychoanalysis,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 3 (1968).

44. *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1973).

45. George Santayana exaggerates the charge in his polemic *The Ego in German Philosophy* but he is not alone in doing so; Marx's *German Ideology* makes the same point from within.

text of human consciousness, in which Nature and all gods but human spirit are relegated to a small and unobtrusive place.

The starting point of the question of self-identity, at least in modern European philosophy, is Descartes. Descartes had a very definite view of self-identity; "I am," he insisted, "a thinking thing," a substance distinct from the physical substances of the world. From this conception of self, the so-called "Problem of Knowledge" begins; how can I get outside my self to know the world? But here, we are simply concerned with the nature of that self itself. What is it? What is its domain? How is it related, if at all, to other selves?

Benedictus Spinoza, reacting to Descartes, denied the viability of distinct "substances," and he saw quite clearly that the separation of self and physical reality (including one's own body) would lead to insurmountable difficulties. In one sense, his reply consists of a metaphysical nicety; he claims that thinking is not itself a substance but an "attribute" of the One and Only Substance (or God). But with this metaphysical nicety, he also destroyed the Cartesian image of a distinctive, individual self, and in its place he argued that our distinctions of individual selves are illusory: our true identities are as part and parcel of the one Great Substance, God. We can already see why this view made such a deep impression on the intellectuals of Germany, particularly Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling, as well as Hegel. What they did *not* like about Spinoza was the comparatively passive conclusion he drew from this picture, which they took to be the view that each of us is determined by forces entirely beyond our powers. And the point of attack, first in Fichte and Jacobi, later in Schelling and Hegel, was to accept Spinoza's monistic vision but to reject his determinism. "*Freedom* is the first and last word in philosophy," announced Schelling, summarizing the view of all of them. Or, "substance must be subject as well," writes Hegel in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, the *author* of fate rather than simply its victim.⁴⁶

Leibniz too represents a variation on the Cartesian picture, and his impetus begins with the same objections he shared with Spinoza—the unintelligibility of interaction between different substances. But rather than reduce all substances to One, Leibniz suggests that, though there are many substances, they do not interact at all; they only seem to. Thus we derive the notion of the self-enclosed self that prefigures the future of German philosophy.

46. This is nowhere more clearly stated than in Hegel's early essay "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," but it is just as much a part of the *PG*, esp. in Part III ("Reason"). Hegel's attitude toward passivism and other-worldliness is wholesale disdain, from the "unhappy consciousness" of Christian asceticism to the "beautiful soul" of Jesus himself.

On the other side of the English Channel, theories of the self were taking a more common-sense turn; John Locke suggested that self-identity consisted in the continuity of experience and, in particular, memories. David Hume objected that he found in his experience *only* a sequence of experience and memories, but nothing that would count as a “self.” But there was no serious challenge to the common-sense assumption that the self referred to individual human beings, each with his or her “own mind.” It was assumed that the self is a “thing,” whether mind as such, a “substance,” or an ingredient “in” the mind. Even Hume only disagreed that there is such an ingredient; he did not challenge the view that the self—if there were one—would be such a thing.

The turning point in this development was, again, Kant. Along with his “Copernican revolution” in the theory of knowledge, he developed an equally radical revision of our concept of self-identity. First of all, he rejects the idea of the self as a “thing.” (Hegel says, in his *Logic*, one of Kant’s most important contributions was the fact that he “destroyed the ‘soul-thing’ in philosophy once and for all.” (*Logic*, para 47).) In place of the “thing,” Kant substitutes an *activity*. Thus the determinism of Spinoza’s model will give way to the “free activity” of self that defines the German Idealists. Kant also rejects the common-sensical idea that one simply “sees” oneself in experience; rather, one discovers the activity of the self through reflection on experience, as its transcendental source of principles. It is a presupposition of experience, but not itself an object of experience. And from this seemingly simple revision, the most dramatic consequences of German Idealism will follow.⁴⁷

It is the fact that the self is not—cannot be—an object of experience, that allows first Fichte, then Schelling and Hegel, to argue what is most outrageous to common sense, that the self is ultimately not an individual self, but a *general* self, common to all of us. In other words, the idea that each person has a self, which at first seems unquestionable, is shown to be nonsense. Of course, as we argued earlier in this Chapter, there are other reasons for pursuing this thesis; by making the self supra-personal the apparent “necessity” of our experience, which we as individuals cannot change, can be explained without ref-

47. Kant’s theory of the “transcendental unity of consciousness” was not intended as a theory of self-identity, of course. It was, quite the contrary, a somewhat selfless theory of knowledge. Nevertheless, the use of the “ego” in Kant’s philosophy inevitably implies a view of self-identity. It is in part a Cartesian view—the self as thinking—in part an anti-Cartesian view—the self is not a “thing.” But though the generality of the transcendental self is intended primarily as an account of the impersonality of knowledge, its implications as a theory of self-consciousness were quite evident to Kant’s followers, Fichte in particular.

erence to an odious "thing in itself." But epistemology aside, there is a more moving reason,—the whole spirit of the times, the need for consolidation and unity, so well expressed in Hölderlin's poetic metaphor.

The argument, though never clearly stated, seems to be this:⁴⁸ Even Kant talks cautiously about "*the* transcendental self," unwilling to make the glib assumption that each person "has" such an ego. In his "practical writings," Kant seems to leave no doubt about his common-sense reliance on the one person—one Self correlation, but in his third *Critique*, the image of an all-embracing universe appears once again, and one could argue that the common-sense correlation is not assumed there but rather left problematic, with the image of a universal self something of a "rational ideal." And since Kant continuously emphasizes the fact that the self is always "behind" our experience and never its object, the ultimate identity of the self is indeed a question for Reason, not understanding, and certainly not "common sense."

As a question of Reason, the self can no longer be assumed to be identical to the individual conglomeration of feelings, experiences, memories, a particular body, history, and so on—or what Kant calls, "the empirical ego." And since Hegel argues that Reason is by its very nature "fluid" rather than fixed, it follows that there can be many different conceptions of self, rather than just one. Indeed, his main argument against Descartes, and against Kant's "transcendental unity of consciousness," is that these conceptions of self are *empty*. Self-identity, as we well know, is not simply a question of "I think, therefore I am." An "identity crisis" is not just a philosophical confusion; it is the search for a *content*, for an acceptable conception of what I am—what we are. And so, on Hegel's account, the question once again turns out to be, "What are the possible forms of self-consciousness?" and, at the same time, "Which is the best?" And since the ideal of reason is always unity, Hegel concludes that the best conception of self is our shared conception of ourselves as *everything*, an absolute identity with each other and the world.

The technical presuppositions of the argument can be simply explained. If the self is not an object of experience, then by Kant's own insistence it cannot be conceived through the concepts of the understanding—the categories of substance, causality, and so on. In one section of the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the first *Critique*, with the formidable title "The paralogisms [fallacies] of rational psychology," Kant argues just this: it is an error to think of the self as a "thing" (a

48. I have argued this interpretation in detail in my "Hegel's Concept of *Geist*," which is reprinted in A. MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

“soul”). But this also means that the categories of “quantity”—that is, our apparatus for distinguishing things and counting them—are not applicable to the self either. Thus we are not justified in saying that there are so many transcendental selves, or in saying that there is one of them for every person. Indeed, one cannot literally (only grammatically) say that there is *only one* self (as Spinoza did), for that too would be quantifying. One can only say, “there is self” (*der Geist*), without limitations or restrictions. Thus the self becomes the Absolute, or absolute Spirit, whether known through “intuition” (as in Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling) or developed through “the concept” (as the most adequate conception of reality, as in Hegel).

This may sound absurd, but it follows quite straightforwardly from presumptions that few philosophers had called into question. And the concept of “*Geist*” has its common sense aspects too; we talk all the time without a sense of absurdity about “team spirit,” a shared sense of self in which the group and its ambitions are everything, the individual player or fan purely secondary and supportive. We talk about “the spirit of ’76” as a nationally shared sense of self, and though our own prejudices usually fall on the side of the individual self, the point is not unfamiliar to us that the self may be something more than this as well. Indeed Hegel’s argument is that it is *our* conception of the individual self that is ultimately empty, that it is only through identification with a Self larger than our individual selves, that life has any meaning, that a self has any identity at all.

Spirit is even more than this, however. The idea that all consciousness is ultimately one strikes most philosophers as implausible, to say the least, but Hegel also says that this one consciousness, as Spirit, includes not only the totality of human beings but the whole universe as well. And this, they would argue, is absurd. But even apart from the grand metaphors that inspire Hegel’s philosophy, there is a very good argument for his view that can be drawn, once again, from the most innocent premises. Most philosophers, these days, acknowledge that Descartes’s dualism of mind and body was a dreadful mistake. For years, every major thinker in the West tried his or her hand at resolving the paradoxes that resulted from that mistake, but more recently, it has become apparent that the very terms themselves need to be rejected. Such diverse thinkers as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and now an army of “functionalists” reject not only the dualism but the terms in which it is formulated. P.F. Strawson, some years ago, argued that one could make sense of the terms “mind” and “body” only if one already presupposed the more “primitive”

concept of a “person.”⁴⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty has argued that what we call “the mind” is nothing but the purposiveness of the body, that they cannot be distinguished except in very special circumstances (e.g. in discussions of the physiological workings of “the body”).⁵⁰ And this is Hegel’s view too. The self is not separable from the body; consciousness is necessarily “embodied” (which does not mean “in” a body.) But Hegel also believes that there is no ultimate priority to be given to the notion of the individual self, so what follows is that our collective consciousness must be considered in terms of its collective body as well. What is that? Well, at the least, it is the sum total of living human flesh—a cosmic orgy of sorts. But, of course, it is only in certain specialized circumstances that we restrict our “physical selves” to our flesh alone; we count our clothes, our cars, our property in general. In fact, it was a generally agreed-upon principle at the time, excepting only a handful of radical socialists, that a person’s property constituted an essential part of his or her identity. (Without property—Goethe argued, along with Robespierre—a person is less than a person, and certainly not a citizen.) And so we include in our collective body not only our collective flesh but our collective property—the lands we have worked and made fruitful, the animals we have tamed, the machines we have created, the mountains we have depicted in our paintings, the stars we have studied in our science—and what is left? Not much, a meaningless residue of items deemed not worthy of our attention. Spirit, our collective self, includes the world as well.

Science, System, Dialectic: The Problem of Necessity

The true form in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth —*Phenomenology*

No view of Hegel has been more persistently stubborn in the face of its own inadequacies than the idea that the *Phenomenology* is a *proof*, and the dialectic is its method. Of course, the *Phenomenology* does include lots of arguments; but for that matter, so does Goethe’s *Faust*. But *Faust* doesn’t prove much of anything—except the genius of its author, and it certainly doesn’t prove, on the basis of Faust’s unexpected salvation at the end of Part II, that salvation is after all the “end” of Faust’s lusty journey with the devil. So too, Hegel’s dialectic

50. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).

is a grand sequence of forms and transformations, ending in a perhaps gratuitous statement of "absolute knowing." It is a demonstration of the varieties of human experience, and the importance of understanding this variety in contrast to and juxtaposition with any other and in the context of the whole. But that hardly constitutes a "proof" of the Absolute in the dramatic theological terms often invoked.

And yet, by Hegel's own insistence—in the Preface at least—philosophy must be *scientific* and *systematic*, which means a *deduction* in which each step is demonstrated to be *necessary* and logically determined by the last. This insistence has sent five generations of British commentators looking for Hegel's deductive proofs, assuming that Hegel meant by "deduction" what John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell meant by that word—a formal proof according to pre-established rules of inference, guaranteeing (if the premises are true) the truth of the conclusion. The problem, as everyone soon found out, was that very few of Hegel's arguments look like deductions in this sense. And where such arguments could be found, they as often as not come off clearly invalid. The critics, accordingly, concluded that Hegel was a very bad philosopher indeed. Those who kept the faith concluded that something ingenious and subtle had escaped them.

What Hegel meant by "Science" and "system" is essential here. On the one hand, he objected to those who claimed that one couldn't articulate and argue philosophical truth—Jacobi and the Romantics; he objected too to those supposed philosophers for whom articulation meant "a string of random assertions and assurances about the Truth" (*Phenomenology*, 1). (Thus he would certainly have rejected both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who often wrote philosophy in aphorisms and anecdotes, but they in return dismissed him; Nietzsche, for example, commented that "the will to a system is a lack of integrity."⁵¹ On the other hand, however, Hegel just as vigorously rejected those undeniably rigorous and systematic philosophers who attempted to demonstrate what they believed in a quasi-mathematical system (e.g. Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza). In the academic context in which he was writing, the demand for "Science" and "system" were the requirements of the day, and the words alone were passwords to success. To be "scientific" meant to be rigorous, careful, thorough, complete—the scholarly virtues. To accuse someone of being "unscientific" was an academically respectable way of condemning him. Thus Reinhold accused Schelling of being "unscientific," and Hegel so accused Reinhold. Hegel and Schelling called Fichte "unscientific," and finally, in

51. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, I. 26, in Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (New York, Viking, 1956).

the *Phenomenology*, Hegel turned the same abuse on Schelling and his followers. Indeed, the whole movement of German Idealism began when Reinhold and Fichte declared even the great Kant to be insufficiently “systematic,” by which they meant that he had not succeeded in showing the unity of his work. But the words “science” and “system” were first of all *emotive* terms, academic weapons, terms of praise and abuse. And when Hegel says, again and again and again in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, that he is being “scientific,” this emotive meaning must be kept in mind.

The effect of this largely verbal emphasis on system and Science in the *Phenomenology*, however, (almost entirely confined to the Preface and Introduction) is to raise the expectations for some grand philosophical demonstration, for some rigorous form of proof. Hegel talks about necessity, “system” and “Science,” but then immediately one confronts the most unsystematic and unscientific arguments, which by no amount of generous interpretation can be identified as valid deductions. And so it seems—possibly Hegel didn’t know what he was doing at all, or he tried to be systematic but utterly failed, almost at every turn, or he did indeed succeed but in such a devious manner that we more common mortals cannot possibly comprehend.

A more reasonable suspicion, however, would be that what Hegel meant by “deduction” was not at all what modern British philosophers mean by that term. The term comes rather from Kant, and if one seeks a precedence for Hegel’s apparent imprecision one need only look at Kant’s much celebrated “transcendental deduction of the categories” in his first *Critique*. Kant took the term “deduction” not from the formal proofs of logic but rather from 18th-century jurists, for whom the term (now obsolete) established a *right* rather than proved some state of affairs.⁵² Hegel takes the term from Fichte, for whom a “deduction” was essentially a “practical” matter, of searching out the presuppositions of self-identity. But even this is too “logical” for Hegel; unlike Fichte or Kant, Hegel refuses to begin with any premise (or “first principle”) at all, thus eliminating from the start the essence of “deduction” in the logical sense. For him a “deduction” is literally “leading from,” not according to the rules of logic but according to the end one wants to reach. And what Hegel wants to do is to get us to see our experience as a whole. “Deduction” is a journey, “demonstration” is a “showing”; “dialectic” is a conversation, and none of these should be construed as a logical proof.

This does not mean, of course, that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is thereby

52. See, for example, Körner, *Kant* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 57.

wholly arbitrary and haphazard, as critics and even the faithful—in moments of despair—have often concluded. (For example, J. N. Findlay: “The effort to see the wood for the arbitrary trees is, in the case of Hegel, often superhuman; it becomes easier when one realizes that the trees *are* disposed in an arbitrary manner.”⁵³) There are many modes of organization besides the mathematical-deductive method, and many ways of taking steps besides strict deductive inference. The question is—what is Hegel’s method, if it is not to be considered “arbitrary”? What is “dialectic”? What is the structure of the *Phenomenology*?

The answer to these questions, in general, is rather simple, once we get out of our minds the meanings that the words “deduction” and “necessity” (in the sense of “deductive necessity”) have for us. The first thing to say is that, if we look at the *Phenomenology* as a journey of sorts, “necessity” means quite simply, “the way one gets from there to here.” In terms of the all-pervasive *Bildung* metaphor, we can see perfectly intelligibly (unless one tries to make a logical deduction out of it) that a plant must produce blossoms before it produces fruits, that the first is a necessary stage to the second, and that the second is a necessary result of the first. Does this mean that there could be no fruits without blossoms? Of course not; one could imagine a scientist developing a plant that springs fruit without flowers, and one can always entertain the customary vision of God’s creation of the vegetable kingdom in which at least one apple seems to have been created *de nihilo*, without the usual botanical preliminaries. Does it mean that a blossom necessarily turns into a fruit, as a matter of logic? Of course not, again; blossoms fail to be fertilized; they are destroyed by wind or chemicals; they are picked for springtime lovers, thus frustrating their “natural necessity.” But we can talk about a necessary progression, nonetheless.

The idea that a certain phenomenon can be seen as necessary in terms of its expected results is evident in another homey example; consider a child beginning to babble. It emits a number of sounds, which increasingly resemble the phonemes of its parents’ language, let us say, Arabic. How do we know that the sounds are proto-Arabic instead of proto-Chinese, or proto-Urdu? Listening to the sounds themselves, we do not. Indeed, they may be indistinguishable. But we say without hesitation that the child is learning Arabic; we are looking forward to the language which the child indeed will learn. Does this mean that the language is already “in the child,” to be learned (or

53. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 93.

manifested) of necessity? Of course not (not even for a Chomskian). Does it mean that the child will inevitably learn Arabic? No again—his parents might move him to Boston. Does it mean that one must so babble before one learns to speak Arabic? No, one can learn the language from a grammar book, only subsequently putting this abstract knowledge into practice. In short, we can talk of necessity in such cases because we are referring to the path we expect to be taken to a particular result. And so too, on the doorstep of what Hegel (mis-) perceived to be the precocious babbling of the German philosophers leading up to the ultimate unification of humanity in 1806, he could look back over the whole of human history and see it in just this sense, as a sequence of “necessary” moments on the way to this apocalyptic conclusion.

Kierkegaard complained (in his *Journals*) that Hegel looked at life “backwards.” But to understand this brand of necessity, one can only look at what one already knows, for it is only by reference to a known result that the concept of “necessity” applies. Regarding blossoms and fruits and babies babbling, we know from numerous experiences what the result will be. But in the epic history of human consciousness—a journey that all of us have not yet been through even once—there is no result to be known, and no steps known along the way, except for those we have already lived through. Hegel does not deny the future, and neither is he a “historicist” in Karl Popper’s sense—who thinks that the future is already predetermined. Regarding the future, one can only guess, and these are contingencies, not necessities. Indeed, looking only a few months, perhaps days ahead, Hegel thought he saw the inevitability of some grand synthesis; and he was wrong. What he did know, without second guessing Napoleon’s ambitions or Metternich’s manipulations, was that he could see the whole of human history from his present vantage point and see it as a necessary progression to this moment. Indeed, one can almost render this as an utterly trivial proposition—that the culminating moment of the entire past is *now*. (Cf. “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” Edification does not always require logical profundity.)

The necessity Hegel is after is nothing other than this sense of progression, of order in the midst of chaos, of *Bildung* in spite of the apparent absurdity of it all. But it is not just a matter of the grand picture, the whole sweep of history, that is subject to such an interpretation. There is necessity in the particular steps too, so long, again, as we do not try to interpret this as the deductive necessity of modern logic. A precise analysis of these necessities must wait until we can actually look at the particular steps in the *Phenomenology*, but this much

can be said here; each of them must be explained in terms of the specific goals implicit in the various parts of the *Phenomenology* as well as in terms of the over-all goal, which Hegel summarizes as *total comprehension* (or “absolute knowing”). Consider two much-abbreviated examples: Suppose we look back on the history of science, let us say, at the history of attempts to explain electro-magnetic phenomena. At the end of the process is the present scientific account, as adequate as that may be. Throughout the process is an implicit goal, which is the all-inclusive explanation of not only this (these two) set(s) of phenomena but virtually all physical phenomena—in what is today called a “unified field theory.” At every particular stage in the investigation, however, there is an established set of accepted hypotheses and techniques which are not to be challenged, certain suggestions which are the topic of lively debate, others which are considered nonsense, the butt of professional jokes if they are discussed at all. Now, in this process of investigation, a theory will be deemed “necessary” in retrospect if it is on the path to the present account. It may be quite evidently false (from our present standpoint). Indeed, it may have even been one of the supposedly nonsensical views of the time, but one which lead or pushed scientists in (what we now recognize as) the right direction. Our present account need not follow from this early theory. It is possible that we might have reached our present conclusions by way of a very different route, in which this particular theory played no part at all. There were other, better theories which are not deemed “necessary” and, one can imagine, future theories of electromagnetism may well trace out a very different history, in which this one is no longer necessary, indeed no longer mentioned, at all. Its necessity is a “backwards-looking” context-bound account of the *process* through which we have arrived at our approximation of the truth. Indeed, without the process, there would be no scientific truth, for there would be no questions, no problems, no context within which the phenomena would be noticed or puzzled over and within which explanations of a certain kind would be called for.

The second example is practical; suppose a young man, let us say Søren Kierkegaard in 1840, seeks self-fulfillment through an uncharacteristic sequence of rebellions and licentiousness. Believing that unceasing pleasure is the way to that sense of self-fulfillment, he indulges, and when unsatisfied, indulges still more. Finally jaded and exhausted, he comes to realize that hedonism is not the way to self-fulfillment; what he begins to see is that self-fulfillment is possible only through other people (as ends, not merely as means to pleasure), which is a step in turn to the realization that only the moral life is the

good life. Now suppose, for the moment, that we accept this progression or, at least, suppose that Kierkegaard (looking back in 1841 on his experience) accepts it; the moves to hedonism and cooperative activity (in whatever form) can be viewed as “necessary” in just this sense—they were appropriate steps on the way.⁵⁴ Again, there is certainly nothing inevitable about it; someone else might have remained a jaded hedonist for the rest of his life. And one need not be a hedonist to become moral. But in the modest sense of “necessity” Hegel is employing, one might say that the brief excursion into dissolute hedonism was necessary as the loss of innocence which is the prerequisite for moral resolution. One cannot *become* moral, many an libertine has argued, unless one has first tasted the other side of life.

To talk about necessity in these two abbreviated examples is certainly not to talk about “necessity” in the modern sense of “logical necessity,” but neither is it to cheapen the term nor to suggest, with several authors, that Hegel has an extremely “loose” sense of necessity.⁵⁵ What Hegel has in mind is a kind of context-bound, *teleological* necessity, necessity within a context *for some purpose*. It is not precise; it cannot be formalized or reduced to a formula. But given this sense of necessity, the transitions in the *Phenomenology* make perfectly good sense, so long as one accepts what Hegel means by “necessity” instead of what he does not mean. Hegel does not mean by “necessity” what Kant means by “a priori.” There are no deductions outside of a context, no transcendental principles to be defended without substantial reference to the “form of consciousness” to which they belong. In the context of scientific explanation, the necessity of a thesis depends on the goal of science—to explain as much as possible as simply as possible. In the context of individual self-fulfillment, the necessity of a resolution depends upon the experiences one has already had and the sort of person that, in some sense, one already wants to be. Necessity means “necessary for,” in some specific context.

But what about the purpose—the necessity of the *Phenomenology* as a whole? The goal of the *Phenomenology*—and of the human Spirit—is what Hegel calls total comprehension. Every form of consciousness, therefore, is a necessary ingredient in that totality—if only because it would not be a totality without it. But more than this, the thesis of the *Phenomenology*—its argument, if you like—is the thesis which is currently called *holism*—the view that, ultimately, meaning and truth reside only by reference to the whole. Each individual argument, there-

54. Indeed, even Kierkegaard writes of “stages on life’s way,” as a matter of (subjective) necessity.

55. C. Taylor, *Hegel*; W. Kaufmann, *Hegel*.

fore, is something of a demonstration of the incompleteness or “one-sidedness” of a particular form of consciousness. The move from one form to another is, first of all, a context-defined move to an apparently better way of conceiving of similar phenomena (e.g. one scientific theory which improves upon another, a moral resolution which “corrects” the follies of another way of life). But every move is at the same time a move toward completeness, an appreciation of the range and the limitations, not just of this or that form of consciousness, but of *every* form of consciousness. And that, again, is absolute knowing or what we call, in everyday life, “experience.”

Within this view of “necessity” and the purpose of Hegel’s book, I want to argue in the pages that follow that Hegel’s much-discussed and much maligned transitions do indeed make sense—even the most difficult of them, given a certain amount of imaginative reconstruction and interpretation in our own terms. Indeed, if we are to understand the *Phenomenology* and its purpose, it is “necessary” that we do so, in just the sense argued above.

Chapter Four (c)

The Phenomenology of Spirit: Its Structure

There is as much hidden logic in Hegel's apparent arbitrariness as in T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*. —J.N. Findlay

The idea of arranging *all* significant points of view in a single sequence . . . is as dazzling to contemplate as it is mad to try. —Walter Kaufmann

What is most striking about Hegel's *Phenomenology* is its structure, or apparent lack of it. Not only does it cover an enormous variety of topics (which in itself is not striking; so does *the Encyclopaedia Britannica*). It orders them in a peculiar, perhaps arbitrary way, which is hardly made any more obvious by the word "dialectic" (which Hegel hardly uses in this book).

It is often said that the *Phenomenology* is first of all a *historical* book, the history of "Spirit" or "the autobiography of God." And indeed, I would argue that the great discovery of the *Phenomenology*, *despite* Hegel's original intentions for the book, is what might be called *historicism*, the view that various "forms of consciousness" are relative to a time and a viewpoint. But the *Phenomenology* has very little to say about history in general. History is said at the end of the book to be "the externalization of Spirit in time," but Hegel is quite clear in stating that history as such is defined by its contingency and not by necessity. The *Phenomenology* is not a book about history, and its structure is not historical, as even the most superficial scan of its contents will reveal. Antigone and pre-historical family life appear not until page 267; Locke, Leibniz, Newton, and Kant make their appearance in the first few chapters, along with Plato and Aristotle. History does make its awaited appearance if rather late in the book, (chapter 6), but it, like everything else, consists of forms of consciousness which are not strictly historical and which are subjected to the conceptual demands of the dialectic. Their order in time, by itself, signifies nothing for Hegel.

To understand the strategy behind the structure, as well as the purpose and rules of the "dialectic," let us begin by looking at the text itself; here, then, is the table of contents:

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VIII. ABSOLUTE KNOWING	479 ³⁶

The first point to make is obvious; the organization of this book is a mess. The book is divided into three parts (A,B,C), but the third part is entirely disproportionate to the other two, containing four complete chapters, each of which is virtually as long as or much longer than the first four chapters together. It is not hard to suspect from

this, as several noted German scholars have argued in some detail,⁵⁷ that Hegel changed his plan or got carried away with himself somewhere in the fifth chapter (on “Reason”) which presumably was to be the conclusion, the demonstration of “the Absolute,” rather than the beginning of an entirely new set of sequences. And within that long, long section on “Reason,” the first chapter (chapter 5) divides into two virtually unrelated parts, the first on the philosophy of nature and science (up to p. 210), the second about what we would probably call “ethics” (211–62). The sixth chapter (“Spirit”) can be argued not to belong in the book at all,⁵⁸ even though it evidently contains some of Hegel’s favorite topics—his discussion of *Antigone* and brother-sister relations and his undisguised commentary on the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The concept of “Spirit” is essential to the book, of course, but that could have been dealt with in much less space, and without the long excursion into history that occupies most of the chapter.

The chapter on religion might seem well placed, but a quick examination of the sections that make it up and Hegel’s introductory remarks on page 410 (and following) make it clear that this discussion too breaks the sequence of the book and introduces an apparently wholly extraneous discussion of the history of religion.⁵⁹ Moreover, Hegel makes it quite clear that the sequence of religions does not follow but rather *parallels* the earlier chapters of the book, thus destroying what readers might prefer to think of as a singular linear sequence. Finally, the chapter on “Absolute Knowing,” supposedly the point of the entire exercise, is *less than fifteen pages long*! If it were not for our contrapuntal historicist thesis, one might well be tempted to say, as Sartre has said of one of his more complex works, that the lion has given birth to a mouse.⁶⁰

57. Theodore Haering, “Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Phänomenologie des Geistes,” *Verhandlungen des dritten Hegelkongresses* (Tübingen, 1934), pp. 118–38. Otto Pöggeler, “Zur Deutung der Phänomenologie des Geistes,” *Hegelstudien*, 1 (1961), 255–91. In a letter to Schelling just after publication (May 1, 1807), Hegel himself admits “the deformity of the later parts” (Kaufmann, p. 319); and in the Preface to the *Science of Logic* he makes similar, if muted confession (§ 25; see the quote at the beginning of Chapter 4b).

58. Pöggeler.

59. The sequence as rendered explicitly historical in Hegel’s later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, published in English translation by Speirs and Sanderson, 3 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1895). The *Philosophy of Religion*, is an essential companion to the reading of *PG*, chap. 7. (We shall use them extensively in our Chapter 10.)

60. *Critique de la Raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) and its companion piece, *Question de la method*.

Hegel's "Dialectic"

Let's go back to the three parts: these are—A. Consciousness; B. Self-Consciousness; C. Reason. In the standard neo-Kantian and in particular Fichtean language of "subject" and "object," one might well identify the first part (A) as the "object" emphasis, the second part (B) as the "subject" emphasis, and the third part (C) as the "unity of subject and object," *à la* Schelling. It is worth noting that the order here is different from Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, which established the standard progression: Fichte starts with the subject (the "I"), moves to "posit" the object (the "not-I"), and then returns toward (but not to) the unity of the two. Hegel starts with the object, moves to the subject, and ends with a synthesis. One can easily make too much of this metaphysical inversion. Fichte starts with Kant ("the transcendental unity of consciousness" and my immediate intuition of myself). Hegel begins with common sense, not a philosophical position, and common sense (or "natural consciousness") takes its essence to be the knowledge of what stands before it, its object (*Gegenstand*). (*Phenomenology* 90–91) Nevertheless, the "I" is plainly present (as individual knowing consciousness), and the shift in part B to "self-consciousness" is in fact Hegel's move to join Fichte. Part B begins with him (but so too does part C).

The predominance of triads in this outline is bound to provoke the suggestion that Hegel does have a Fichtean three-step "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" outline after all. Indeed, not only is the book as a whole divided into three parts, but part A is also divided into three parts, chapter 5 is divided into three sections and each section in turn is divided into three. Chapter 6 and chapter 7 are both divided into three and each part of each is divided into three as well. But before the reader gets too excited about this, let me point out quickly that very few of these triads consist even remotely of two opposing theses and their resolution, and in no case does Hegel use these terms. But one should not conclude, as Kaufmann does, that Hegel has nothing but reproach for this three-step process.⁶¹ In Hegel's later lectures on the history of philosophy, he praises Kant for his discovery of "the universal scheme . . . of knowledge, of scientific movement . . . as thesis, antithesis, synthesis."⁶² But Hegel does not characterize this movement in terms of opposed theses, but rather as

Otherness, Being for consciousness, existence as object;
Being-for-self, for self-consciousness.

61. Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 168.

62. *Lectures*, vol. 3, p. 477.

He does say that this is "the negative of Being-in-itself," but it is "negative" in the unfamiliar sense of *standing over against, distinct from*, not our more usual sense of denial and disagreement. The third movement is "the unity of the two."⁶³ This, of course, fits in quite precisely with Hegel's own three-step breakdown of the *Phenomenology*, even if it requires some distortion of Kant to do so. But even this characterization does not fit most of the transitions between chapters and sections (and within sections). Sometimes, but by no means always, it is the differences (not necessarily opposition) between two forms of consciousness that motivate a transition. But just as often it is the internal inadequacy of a form itself, and the transition marks a modification and attempted improvement on that form rather than, in any sense, an alternative or opposition to it. The moral of this lesson is not, however, that Hegel does not have anything particular in mind with his so-called "dialectical method" or that the structure of the *Phenomenology* follows no particular pattern. It is rather that we should not be too anxious to provide a general and overly rigid characterization of what is often but not always a three-step movement, by which the *Phenomenology* proceeds from beginning to its "absolute" end.

The structure of the *Phenomenology*, like its conception and what it is "about," is torn between conflicting tendencies. As a "system" of absolute Idealism (or the "introduction" thereto), the *Phenomenology* does indeed follow the convenient and traditional three-step procedure from object and subject (or subject and object) to the "unity of the two" in "absolute Knowledge." But this renders over half of the book superfluous, the whole of chapters 6 and 7 and the better part of chapter 5 as well. As a "historicist" investigation of the various forms of consciousness and their interconnections, however, the chapters which are superfluous on the absolute Idealist reading become essential, and the earlier chapters, on epistemology (chapters 1–3) and "self-consciousness" (chapter 4), require by no means minor reinterpretation.⁶⁴ Because of this tension, it becomes virtually impossible to provide a single interpretation of a "method" that does full justice both to the arguments of the first chapters, which are written more or less without reference to history of any kind (most of the arguments are paraphrases of positions in the early Greek metaphysicians and modern empiricism and rationalism), and to the historical chapters later on. Chapter 4 ("Master and Slave" etc.) presents particularly intriguing ambiguities, since it was written both with a rough historical sequence in mind (from primitive pre-history to medieval Chris-

63. Ibid.

64. H.F. Fulde, D. Henrich (eds.), *Materialien zu Hegels 'Phänomenologie des Geistes'* (Frankfurt, 1976), following the outline of the Jena lectures, for example.

tianity) and a discernible logical development, which Hegel abstracts as “freedom—dependence and independence.” One can imagine—but it would be difficult to prove—that Hegel was in the middle of the fourth chapter, describing what Rousseau (among many others) had postulated as “the original state of nature” when he became inspired, or swept away, by a vision of the whole of human history as a series of forms of consciousness. The historical pattern breaks down at the end of the chapter, but picks up again, starting over, in chapter 6, and again, in chapter 7. And then, while writing about “revealed religion” at the end of chapter 7—the deadline getting close and the book almost unmanageably overgrown—it is as if Hegel decided to do what (as absolute Idealist) he should have done hundreds of pages before: present the “Absolute” and be done with it.

There is a second tension, by way of an attempted but unsuccessful synthesis, that explains the awkward structure of the *Phenomenology* too. I have tried to stress all along that Hegel was by no means concerned only with technical philosophical problems. (In his youth, he was the most anti-intellectual of the three schoolmates, and his academic enthusiasm of the early 1800s must be seen in contrast to that.) With Fichte, he was particularly concerned to emphasize the world of practical efforts; and following Kant, he insisted that religion, if it was to become acceptable (“rational”) at all, would have to be thoroughly practical—producing better human beings and more coherent communities, rather than just incomprehensible doctrines and dogmas. But with Schelling, he had come to agree that a proper “system” of philosophy had to integrate both theory and practice, the world of nature and knowledge and the world of freedom and action. But it was by no means clear to him (nor had it been to Kant, Fichte, or Schelling) how he was to do this. So his solution is clumsy, to say the least. He shuffles theory and practice like fat cards in a deck, and by no means neatly. The book begins with about sixty pages of epistemology—the theory of knowledge—then moves to a discussion of the practical dimensions of knowledge, in just a few pages, before launching into his much celebrated discussion of “master and slave” and brutally primitive inter-personal relationships, then Stoicism, Skepticism, and “unhappy consciousness,” all of which might be deemed “practical” reactions to the problems of dependency and the unhappiness of the world. Then, just as suddenly, we enter the realm of “reason” and a somewhat lengthy discussion of what Hegel and Schelling called the “philosophy of nature,” but what we would call philosophy of science. In an important sense, the first half of chapter 5 follows without interruption the end of chapter 3; almost all of chapter 4, except for the first few pages perhaps, might just as well have been deleted or

postponed. Halfway through chapter 5 there is another abrupt transition, and all of a sudden we are talking about hedonism—the life of pleasure. What immediately precedes it in the text is a discussion of the already dated pseudo-science of phrenology and Hegel musing about the double aspects of bones and male urinary organs (p. 210). Again, one might suggest that a smooth transition could just as easily be forged from the end of chapter 4 and “unhappy consciousness” directly into the middle of chapter 5 and hedonism. After all, is there any more “natural” or familiar transition than the one from the life of unhappy religious asceticism into a deluge of sensualism and debauchery? (Kierkegaard’s single year of sensualism with Hans Christian Andersen, for instance, was a clear but clearly unsuccessful attempt to counteract the neurotically guilt-ridden Christianity he had been taught by his father.) It is as if the discussion of “*Naturphilosophie*” had no role to play whatsoever. (Should Kierkegaard have taken a term to study biology?)

What this gives us is a very different picture of the structure of the *Phenomenology*, an amalgam (hardly a “synthesis”) of two books, one more or less “practical,” the other “theoretical.” Thus one might redo the table of contents (in broad outline) like this:

(*Phenomenology* of Theory)

Preface

Introduction

A. Consciousness

C.(AA)v.A.Observing Reason

(*Phenomenology* of Practice)

B. Self-Consciousness

B. Actualization of rational
self-consciousness . . .

C. Individuality . . .

BB. Spirit

CC. Religion

DD. Absolute Knowing

It is as if the final chapter were merely the hinge holding the two books together.

When we combine this complex dissection with the tension between absolute Idealism and historicism, the journey does indeed become convoluted. Add too the fact that the historical chapters, at least, do not follow the sequence but rather begin over again, and that even chapter 4 and the first part of chapter 5 are forced into parallel with chapters 1, 2, and 3. Thus the sequence begins to look like this, in some supposedly “ascending” order:

	(theory)		(practical)
Preface			
Introduction			
Chap. 1	Chap. 5Aa	4A	Chap. 5B Chap. 6A Chap. 7A
Chap. 2	5Ab		6B 7B
Chap. 3	5Ac	4B	Chap. 5C 6C 7D
		Chap. 8	

Charts are often absurd in philosophy, and they usually have the effect of rendering ridiculous rather than clear the structures they are intended to clarify. But the growing complexity here is revealing. In the Preface, Hegel displays a penchant for mixed metaphors. He variously calls the *Phenomenology* a “ladder,” a “circle,” a “highway,” an education (*Bildung*), a “realization”—making actual what is only potential, and, though he does not exactly say so, a spiral, twirling us from common sense “up” to the Absolute. It is also a self-enclosed self, coming to recognize itself. But these metaphors, taken one by one, give us very different pictures of the structure of the book and the interrelation of its various forms. A ladder simply goes straight from A to C. What we might then conclude is that it is a ladder with too many rungs, so many in fact that one cannot get one’s foot in to climb it. A circle goes nowhere, and if the *Phenomenology* is a circle one might well drop the Absolute altogether (unless, of course, one simply *calls* the circle itself “the Absolute,” which Hegel sometimes suggests). One can look at the *Phenomenology* as a series of circles (as Klaus Hartmann does)⁶⁵—thus we get to the end of “Spirit” just to start over with “Religion.” But here Hegel’s constant reference to “higher levels” might lead us to combine the circle image with the ladder image and see the *Phenomenology* and its structure as a series of connected ascending circles, or perhaps, two intertwined spirals, like a DNA molecule, one strand representing knowledge, the other ethics, culture, and religion. In fact, that image is quite Kantian, and Kant himself suggested—but not as a piece of “knowledge”—that a rational person would have some such picture, of nature and freedom developing in parallel, and it remained for Schelling simply to add to this “regulative idea” the claim that the two strands were *in fact* identical, merely two aspects of one and the same Absolute, realizing itself through time. Indeed, there are any number of combinations of these metaphors, perhaps new and ingenious topologies that have not yet been invented. The problem is, once we stop playing

65. K. Hartmann, “Hegel: A Non-Ontological View,” in MacIntyre, (ed.), *Hegel*, and elsewhere.

with the metaphors and go back to the text, there is still no linear, circular, spiral, or self-reflective order that seems to fit.

When one sits down and actually tries to *read* this treatise none of these images are anything more than encouraging suggestions. Pressed with the need to actually understand the various transitions in the *Phenomenology*, these exciting but vague metaphors are of only minimal help. Indeed, what they tell us is that one *cannot* simply read this book as a linear progression of forms in any particular logical sequence. They are disrupted by Hegel's own confused vision of his project. They are disjointed because of Hegel's crude amalgam of theory and practice. They are turned back on themselves by a series of chapters that do not progress but fold onto each other—and can we really take Hegel's word "higher" (or the verb, *aufheben*) in any easy sense? Are the various forms of religion really more advanced (and in what sense?) than their equivalent (in what way?) forms in Spirit? Are the speculations of phrenology really more sophisticated or "mature" than the Kantian critical philosophy? Indeed, so many readers and commentators have for so long followed Hegel in the uncritical recognition of "higher" stages in the *Phenomenology* that one can only wonder whether they did, as Hegel insists, get "into" the forms of consciousness rather than racing along side of them, always with the illusion of a progression.

If the *Phenomenology* is not an ascending linear sequence, what could it be? Well it could be a mistake, a disjointed, disrupted argument written in haste. This would free us of the effort to account for it (unless one happens to delight in philological pathology), but I see no point in writing about the *Phenomenology* by way of an autopsy. It is a *living* book, and what needs to be understood is its form of life. Despite its faults and flaws, but making allowances for its confusions and clumsiness, it has a structure that deserves detailed analysis.

The PHENOMENOLOGY as Art: The World as Willful Representation

Art is reason itself, adorned by genius, following a necessary course
and controlled by higher laws. —Delacroix, *Journals*

Hegel's much celebrated demonstration of the "necessity" of his convoluted progression must always be juxtaposed with his own recognition of the complementarity and continuous significance of the

various “forms of consciousness” that make up the diversity of human life. In his later *Logic* (par. 25), for example, he looks back on the *Phenomenology*, in all of its complexity, and remarks:

In my *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which on that account was at its publication described as the first part of the System of Philosophy, the method adopted was to begin with the first and simplest phase of mind, immediate consciousness, and to show how that stage gradually of necessity worked onward to the philosophical point of view, the necessity of that view being proved by the process. But in these circumstances it was impossible to restrict the quest to the mere form of consciousness. For the stage of philosophical knowledge is the richest in material and organization, and therefore, as it came before us in the shape of a result, it presupposed the existence of the concrete formations of consciousness, such as individual and social morality, art and religion. In the development of consciousness, which at first sight appears limited to the point of form merely, there is thus at the same time included the development of the matter or of the objects discussed in the special branches of philosophy. But the latter process must, so to speak, go on behind consciousness, since those facts are the essential nucleus which is raised into consciousness. The exposition accordingly is rendered more intricate, because so much that properly belongs to the concrete branches is prematurely dragged into the introduction.

The *Phenomenology* may well be a demonstration of the “philosophical point of view,” but it is *also* a broad panorama of human forms of life. From this perspective (which might also be called “philosophical”), the *Phenomenology* is not so much a sequence of forms or ideas as it is a multifaceted representation of human life, complete with “concrete formations” and details. Indeed, if only to shake off the traditional single-sequence interpretation of the book, let us suggest a quite different perspective on the *Phenomenology*, more akin to Goethe’s *Faust* than to Fichte’s deductive *Wissenschaftslehre*. Suppose we were to compare the *Phenomenology* with a panoramic painting, rather than a single-minded argument. What, then, would we see?

First of all, we would give up the idea that the book is a linear sequence (except insofar as any book, even a book by John Cage or Marshall McLuhan, is trapped within the linear medium of type). But paintings aren’t linear either, not even a “linear” painting. Why not? Because, although one looks at a painting over a period of time (even if only a few seconds), the painting itself doesn’t dictate the order of looking. An artist can make powerful suggestions (Van Gogh’s cornfields come to mind), but the medium doesn’t dictate a direction. One can start anywhere, and allow one’s eye to follow the textures and colors, the contours and chiaroscuro, as well as, perhaps, the lines.

This in no sense makes the painting “illogical,” or the medium itself “arbitrary.” What might well be illogical, in fact, is an observer’s insistence that the only way to “read” a painting (the word is instructive) is to follow it according to some pre-ordained system, to see the painting through the theory rather than to see what the painting itself is “about.”⁶⁶

Suppose we were to look at the *Phenomenology* as a painting, perhaps an abstract expressionist or, better, an analytic cubist painting—though this would make it far ahead of its time. (An apt and appropriately contemporary analogy would be Delacroix’s magnificent *Death of Sardanapalus*, which was painted at the height of the Romantic era in France, a few years later.⁶⁷) What we are given is a picture, a *representation*. But it is a picture not of a single state of affairs, rather of history, even of “human nature.”

What is a representation? The term has a rich philosophical ancestry, for example, in John Locke’s epistemology, in which mental acts or ideas are said to *represent*, that is, resemble and correspond to, objects in the world. Weakly construed, a representation need only “stand for” what it represents; strongly construed, a representation literally imitates or reproduces (“re-presents”) its original. In the German Idealist tradition, the notion of representation takes on an even stronger sense, in which the representation not only *presents* a certain form or position but also *gives* it explicit form, which it may not have otherwise. Thus a representative of a district in a republican government might well define his constituency and make demands on its behalf which its members themselves would not make, and a representation of a person by way of an artistic portrait might well bring out features and display an aspect of a personality which is not nearly so explicit in the person. A representation, in other words, may go beyond mere correspondence with what it represents; nevertheless, there is an obvious sense in which a representation is *bound* to a set of forms which precede it. In Hegel’s case, the representations of the *Phenomenology* are bound to nothing less than the whole of human experience, and to presenting adequately what so much of traditional philosophy has left out of the picture.

66. This distinction has broken down in recent years, as Tom Wolfe points out in his *The Painted Word* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975). Paintings now become illustrations of theories, and the viewing presupposes some knowledge of the theory. The shift is ironic, now that people often read philosophy without any compulsion whatever to learn its presuppositions; they rather look on, as if appreciating a painting in a gallery.

67. I compare Hegel and Delacroix at length in my *History and Human Nature*, ch. 13 (“The Classic and Romanticism Game”).

Throughout his career, from the *Differenz*-essay in 1801 to his last Lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel insisted that "the ultimate aim and the business of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the Concept (*Begriff*) with reality."⁶⁸ That is, to get the representation right, to make it "work," to make it consistent, to leave nothing out of it. And "reality" includes not just the present state of affairs but—as in all romantic art—history and genesis too, and the whole of human nature. And so a "systematic" philosophy is one in which everything is indeed represented, and in its proper place. Leaving out nature, or history, or selfishness would be to leave out an essential piece of the picture. Is there any *one* way such a representation should be depicted? Of course not. But whatever way it is depicted, it has to hold together and fit everything in. For the representation to be "scientific" is for it to be articulate and actually worked out, as opposed, for example, to a mere *idea* for a painting. Thus considered, Hegel's attack on Schellingian "intuition" was a precocious attack on "conceptual art," art that, despite its name, is satisfied with intention and dispenses with the "hard work of realizing the Concept."⁶⁹

The comparison with painting is an illustration, at best; the emphasis on "representation" is to be taken literally. But "representation" is not limited to "the facts of the case," and philosophy is not a verbal *trompe l'oeil* description of every little detail about human existence. It selects out the forms of human experience and represents them with a few judicious examples. It goes beyond the facts of human experience to essences, to the emotions that define an experience (whatever the facts), to the desires and ambitions whose essence is to deny the facts and go beyond them. A representation is not (as in Locke) something that stands *between* ourselves and the world but (as in Kant) a scheme of interpretation, *of* the world. A representation of human existence is not a "proof" of anything, to be sure, but it is, nevertheless, a *demonstration*, a way of *showing* us a certain view of life. Different representations give us different views, and different views are appropriate for different times, different cultures, different styles. (One would not expect a Rembrandt portrait to resemble a de Kooning; one is surprised and delighted when a Picasso resembles a "primitive" ceremonial drawing.) But this is not to say that different representations cannot be compared and contrasted, evaluated as "more" or "less" representative—*so long as one always remembers the standpoint from which*

68. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 545. "*Begriff*" translated as "Concept" rather than "Notion."

69. This must always be balanced with Schelling's query in his letter to Hegel of Nov. 2, 1807, in which he confesses that he fails to understand Hegel's opposition of intuition to concept.

one is doing the evaluating. This is where Hegel waffles with his “absolute” standpoint—the standpoint of philosophy; it is, on the one hand, a standpoint; on the other hand, it is not. The assumption is, in a sentence, that particular representations and perspectives may vary but *the Concept*, that is, conceptual thinking, is by its very nature universal and “unconditioned.”⁷⁰ Hegel believes, on the absolutist analysis, that a perfectly clear representation of human life is possible. Nevertheless, from any particular standpoint (which is what we get in the *Phenomenology*) representations can be compared and contrasted, to see how well they “represent”—even if, as in modern art and literature, they are only “representing” themselves.

Where a representation claims only to represent “the facts as they are,” the business of interpretation might be as simple as pointing out “the facts.” But in the representations of philosophy, and in particular, of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, it is rarely the facts themselves that are in question. It is their significance, their meaning, the various ways in which they can be and have been seen and interpreted. The *Phenomenology*, in other words, is almost entirely a representation of various representations of life (which is not at all to say that it is not also about life). Indeed, since the philosophers’ theories are about concepts we use to understand our ordinary experience, one might even say that the book is largely a play-off of representations of representations of representations (“representation³”). The problem, therefore, is to be clear about the purpose of such representations, which is virtually never merely to depict the mere facts of human existence, but almost always to provide some form of *self-awareness*.⁷¹ This means not only the interrogation of a particular philosopher and what he or she is after, but the interrogation of a point of view (such as “when we ask sense-certainty what *it* means by . . .”)⁷² Hegel’s underlying thesis is that every viewpoint makes an effort to become all-encompassing, and the question is always why one should hold this particular position in contrast to certain others. Sometimes, as in a child’s drawing, the answer may be mere naïveté; elsewhere, as in a “childlike” *New Yorker* cover

70. *Science of Logic*, Miller trans., p. 600f.

71. Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics* (Berlin in the 1920s), especially the Introduction, in a new translation by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

72. These different levels of representation are in turn represented by three different “voices” in the *PG*, a purely descriptive voice (of the form of consciousness itself) a more polemical and philosophical voice (expounding and defending that form of consciousness), and the reflective omniscient voice of Hegel himself, who has gone through the process and is repeating it “for us.” But none of these voices is possible without the others, since it is the lower voices that give the upper voices their content, and the higher voices that give the lower voices their prompting and their articulateness.

drawing, the answer may be a sophisticated response which includes not only reflections on childhood naïveté but nostalgia and a host of complex artistic theories as well.

How does one evaluate a representation? One sees whether it succeeds in doing what it sets out to do. This means, of course, that there can be no evaluation without knowing the intentions behind it and the context within which it is supposed to serve as a representation. How inclusive a representation should be depends on its intentions and context; what counts as internal consistency—whether the representation “works”—also depends on its intentions and context. But where the intentions and context include the representation of the whole of human existence—as the Romantic artists and Hegel insisted—one can indeed complain if anything essential to life and self-understanding is left out or under-appreciated. This demand, which is itself a “standpoint”, is the criterion for Hegel’s “Absolute.” Thus Fichte provided a representation of the human will but neglected the realm of nature. Thus Spinoza (or so Hegel charged) emphasized the unity of substance but underplayed the importance of spirit, consciousness, and will. Thus Descartes and Kant included both consciousness and physical nature but failed to give them both an integrated place in the representation. But “consciousness” and “nature,” taken by themselves, are mere abstractions. One does not represent them as such. (Their names alone do not yet count as representations; they are just the titles of representations.) One needs the details, the forms of consciousness in which they are represented, which is not to say, in a “philosophy of nature,” for example, that one must in any sense display (much less “deduce”) every single blade of grass. Indeed, an artist who tried to do so (the one-hair brushstrokes of the Flemish masters) might well present a faulty representation no less than a child-artist who fails to adjoin the grass and sky or draws the eyes at the top of the face.

What does this do to the notion of “necessity” in the *Phenomenology*? Within a representation, there is indeed a kind of “necessity,” a sense of order, proportion, and perspective. But this does not mean that there is only one way to look at it, or one way of depicting it. And indeed, where it is life as a whole that is being represented, the “necessity” is made all the more complicated by the fact that the essence of (conceptual) life itself is representation, according to Hegel, and so there are always representations within the representations, embedded theories and interpretations even in the seemingly most “factual” judgments of the philosophers. The necessity of the *Phenomenology*, therefore, largely consists in the placement and order of

these higher-order representations, theories in response to theories, interpretations in juxtaposition to other interpretations. It is not a logic of implication, however, so much as a logic of *contrasts*, the one figure making sense only as a response to another. There need not be any fixed starting point, and there may not be a concluding point either. The “internal necessity” of the *Phenomenology* is rather any of a number of paths our attention follows in our growing appreciation of Hegel’s ultimate conclusion, which is not a part of the representation but rather the totality of the representation itself. In other words, you cannot properly appreciate a part of the painting unless you get a glimpse of the whole. But that necessity presupposes the strategy of the *Phenomenology* itself which, like many great paintings, provides us with recognizable and seemingly unavoidable necessities within.⁷³

What does this mean in terms of our reading of the *Phenomenology*? First, it means that we should read the book as a representation, an artistic rendering—but through concepts (*Begriffe*) rather than visual images (*Vorstellungen*)—of human representations of life. In this, it might better be compared to Goethe’s *Faust* than Kant’s first *Critique*, as we have suggested in other contexts. Second, we can view it as a demonstration—a showing—without thereby construing it as so many commentators have tried and failed to do—as a proof or a deduction of a certain conclusion. Third, we can understand the inner “necessity” of the work in terms of the order of its parts, without thereby supposing that there is any necessary starting point, or any necessary end point, or any specifically “necessary” route for our eye to follow. But this does *not* mean that one can catch isolated and discontinuous glimpses, as if one were to view detached pieces of canvas, or leaf through the *Phenomenology* reading a page or section here, a page or chapter there. The *Phenomenology* is not, as Findlay has suggested, a mere collection of insights and arguments. One must follow continuously, but in no particular order and, possibly, in several different sweeps of attention. Fourth, this means—contrary to the insistence of many commentators and perhaps against Hegel’s own occasional claims—that there is no single way of reaching “the Absolute”—that is, seeing the whole picture—no definitive sequence of forms as well as no starting point and no set point of completion. In other words, one could start reading the *Phenomenology* almost anywhere. One could reorder chapters and sections, redistribute the arguments, and even turn the book upside down, as Marx and Feuerbach more or less suggested. No matter where one begins, one moves quite naturally,

73. For a graphic representation of this “logic,” in appropriately perverse form, see Jacques Derrida’s very Hegelian *Glas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974).

"necessarily," to those other parts of the representation without which it could not be a complete representation of (representations of) life, a "system," a "phenomenology of the human Spirit." Some alterations, of course, would require gigantic alterations almost everywhere else; for example, if one began the book with the chapter on "unhappy consciousness" or the chapter on the Enlightenment. (If you move just the nose on a portrait, you have to repaint everything else too.) On the other hand, some alterations require minimal adjustment, for instance, beginning the book with chapter 4 and the discussion of "life and desire" or, perhaps, beginning one's reading with the discussion of "rational self-consciousness" (chapter 5).⁷⁴ Indeed, one could vary one's reading only to discover that most of the philosophers in the history of the discipline can be identified in part by where they began or would have begun their reading of the *Phenomenology*. Fichte begins in chapter 5; Machiavelli in chapter 4, Reinhold Niebuhr in chapter 7, and Rousseau in chapter 6. Schelling, according to Hegel, starts his reading in chapter 8, and thereby loses his momentum. Hegel intends for us to start, of course, with the introduction and chapter 1. Presuming that we do, the sequence flows "naturally," insofar as Hegel takes us through at least one of the more continuous routes. But his is not the only route, and perhaps, in terms of over-all continuity and our over-all sense of the representation, not even the best of them.

If one continues to think of the *Phenomenology* as a single and uniquely logical progression of forms, the over-all intention of which is to "prove" something (the Absolute), then Hegel will indeed, as so many commentators have complained, seem arbitrary, illogical, not true to his own "method."⁷⁵ But if, on the other hand, one views the *Phenomenology* as a whole as a picture, as conceptual art, as a representation of life striving for unity, then the "necessity" of its movements is of another kind. It is a demonstration, not a deduction; a depiction, not a proof. The dialectic is not a "method" but a display in contrasts.

74. In general, any discussion of knowledge eventually leads to a recognition of the importance of practices, and any discussion of practical activities leads soon enough to a discussion of knowledge, frameworks, paradigms, and "the facts." Any discussion of "the facts" will eventually have to turn to a discussion of theories, frameworks of interpretation, and paradigms, but any discussion of theories will soon enough have to turn to the facts. A defense of selfishness inevitably has to confront our desire to be with, be liked by, and cooperate with other people, and any defense of community spirit and shared values has to make room for individual roles and identities. Starting anywhere eventually leads everywhere, and the "logic" of Hegel is that no complete account of life can leave any of these items (and many others) behind. It is the demand for *completeness* that drives the dialectic, that leads us from one form to another until we have our total representation of life.

75. For example, Findlay, Taylor, Kaufmann, Bergmann, to name just a few.

The *Phenomenology* is a great book not because it establishes the Absolute but because it presents us with an ideal portrait of the complex unity and contradictoriness of human life, without losing our sense of either.⁷⁶

Dialectic and "the Development of the Concept"

... wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, *his own body* ... thereby, he said, reflecting his own person ... transaccidented through slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos, common to all flesh, human only, mortal ... —James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

The *Phenomenology* is a representation of (representations of) the varied forms that make up our view(s) of human life. How are these related? In what sense do we follow these forms or concepts—or in what sense do they follow one another? In a painting, forms lead one to another because they are spatially contiguous, or they share a common color, or balance each other on opposite sides of the canvas. None of those factors works in philosophy, except in the not-at-all interesting sense that chapters are also contiguous and sections share a common concern or balance one another in their claims. None of this is sufficient to explain the “dialectic” of the *Phenomenology*, which everyone agrees has a necessity in some sense *intrinsic* to it, and this necessity is called “the self-realization of Spirit”—through “the Concept.” But what does this mean?

Well, first of all, it is worth repeating the point with which we began this discussion, namely, that whatever else it may be, the *Phenomenology* is not a chronology. It is not a “history of the human Spirit” or “the autobiography of God.”⁷⁷ If looking at only the chapter and section headings, it is clear that only a few forms of consciousness are tied to specific historical movements (e.g. the ancient Greek philosophies of Stoicism and Skepticism (*Phenomenology*, 197) and the Enlightenment and the revolutionary Reign of Terror (*Phenomenology* 538, 582). Kant appears several times, in chapter 3 (both “understanding” and “the supersensible world” are references to the first *Critique*), in chapter 5, part C (“Reason as lawgiver” and “Reason as testing laws” are both clear references to his second *Critique*) and in chapter 6, part C (under “morality”). *Antigone* and ancient Greek folk

76. Taylor, p. 127.

77. For example, Findlay, Sterling, McTaggart.

religion appear in chapter 6 (*Phenomenology*, 446) preceded by Romanticism and Rousseau as well as Kant in chapter 5. There is no need to go on. But this is not to say either that the *Phenomenology* has nothing to do with history, and not only in the openly historical chapters (6 and 7).

Second, also by way of repetition, the *Phenomenology* is not an argument, not a deduction, not a proof. Its transitions are in virtually no instance logical inferences, although to be sure, the *Phenomenology* is filled with arguments. Hegel rejects the Cartesian program more completely than most philosophers, for he rejects not only its dualist metaphysics (which today has become as much of an indictment, a *reductio ad absurdum*, as a position as such). He also rejects the whole idea that philosophy must begin with premises or "first principles" which are accepted from the outset and then derive or deduce a number of consequences which are its "results." For Hegel, it is the whole process of *doing* philosophy that constitutes its "truth," or as Kant said, there is no teaching philosophy, for philosophy is not a subject matter: it is a discipline that one learns only by doing. But *doing* philosophy includes making mistakes as well as deriving truths. Waxing paradoxical, one might say (and Hegel does) that errors are part of the truth, even essential to it (*Phenomenology*, 38). The movement of the *Phenomenology*, unlike a series of deductive proofs, is not from truth to truth but rather, in a sense, from error to error. One might say, according to the preceding paradox, that the "truth" of life consists in our various "errors" of representation of it.⁷⁸ But without the paradox, what Hegel is saying (along with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and many other philosophers) is that the "truth" of life is the activity of thinking about it, in what Aristotle called "the life of contemplation." What one thinks initially is not so important as *that* one thinks—for thinking, once begun, tends to follow its own impetus. And this impetus is what Hegel calls "the rigor of the Concept." Thinking need not be deducing; contemplation is not proof; and yet "the Concept" develops according to a "logic," nonetheless, and it is this "logic" that determines the formidable structure of the *Phenomenology*.

If the internal principle of consciousness is, as Hegel thinks it is, the demand for total comprehension of the world of our experience,

78. This paradox, or pseudo-paradox, can be found in much the same form many years later, in Nietzsche. Nietzsche also insists on the importance of "error" in what we call the truth, leading him to such superficially absurd pronouncements as "mankind's truths . . . are the irrefutable errors" (*Gay Science*, #265) and "truth is error" (*Will to Power* #454). For a good discussion of this, see Arthur Danto's *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Free Press, 1965), ch. 2.

then the “logic” of the *Phenomenology* is a progression of approximations, representations of life whose sequence is determined, in a sense, by their own inadequacies. A woman finally divorces her brutish husband and marries a “mouse”; an accountant quits his job and becomes a Hari Krishna. Are these “logical” progressions? In the logicians’ sense—no; but in a perfectly ordinary sense—yes. If x has been tried and exhausted, why not try $\text{not} = x$ next? But not just, “ $\text{not} = x$ ” (that is, *anything* other than x), but a very specific (“determinate”) $\text{not} = x$, its very opposite. And sometimes, this is precisely the structure of the *Phenomenology*; one representation (or “form of consciousness”) fails, and so another is chosen to take its place. But the alternative is not always its “opposite”; sometimes it is a variation of the first form, or an exaggeration or an extreme form of it. Occasionally, it is something seemingly entirely different, especially when not just a single form but a whole line of representations has been shown to be inadequate. But the important point to make here, and again and again, is that the transition from the first form to the second, or the transition from the first form of the *Phenomenology* all the way to the last, is not in any way a deductive necessity. The connections are anything but entailments, and the *Phenomenology* could *always* take another route and other starting points.⁷⁹

Can we generalize about the transitions and, therefore, the over-all structure of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*?—his “dialectic”? In a limited way only.⁸⁰ Every transition consists of two steps; the first is an argument *within* a form of consciousness in order to show how it is incomplete, inconsistent, or otherwise inadequate *by its own standards*. The second is the postulation of an alternative form, which is a “determinate negation” of the first in the sense that it cannot be just *any* alternative but must share at least the standard of the first. That is, a scientific

79. It is for this reason that a formalization of Hegel’s logic, however ingenious, is impossible. See for example, Michael Kosok’s bold attempt in “A Formalization of Hegel’s Logic,” in MacIntyre, *Hegel*. It is the very essence of Hegel’s transitions in both the *PG* and the *Logic* that they are not, as he himself tells us, “determinate”; there is no single sequence, and no sense in which the form alone, apart from the context and the ultimate principle (of total comprehension), determines any sequence at all. One might suggest that the ultimate principle could be turned into a general rule of inference (e.g. $\text{not} (p \text{ and } \text{not-}p)$) or, aping Leibniz and Schelling “ $A = A$ ”—whatever the A , but it is transparently clear that, even if one can *translate* Hegel’s transitions into the form of some such argument, that is very different from being able to reproduce them as proofs, which is the point of formalization. Hegel’s transitions are all context-bound; it is the very point of formal logic to abstract from context and limit itself to transition which hold in *any context* whatever. Whatever else Hegel’s *Logic* may be, it is not an attempt to anticipate the results of the *Principia Mathematica*.

80. I offer a hypothesis regarding the general pattern of the *Phenomenology* in the “Note on Reason and Dialectic” following Chapter 8. The analysis of the transitions themselves is given in some detail in Chapter 7 b, with the focus on the transition from “Sense-Certainty” to “Perception.”

theory can only be replaced by a scientific theory, a moral theory can only be replaced by a moral theory, and so on. But, of course, there is no single standard in any form of consciousness; a hedonist wants pleasure, but on examination he wants pleasure *in order to* make him feel fulfilled, and so the next step need not follow the collapse of hedonism with a new scheme for gaining pleasure; it may instead reject that standard and accept the more general one. And so on for all forms of consciousness, all of which share one ultimate standard, "total comprehension."

The first step can be carried on with rigor and, even, a series of logical deductions of consequences. But the second step, which *moves* the *Phenomenology*, is never wholly determinate. Thus the most frequent transition is the by no means "logical" leap to opposites. Every concept or form makes its own distinctions and thereby contrasts itself with an opposite—black and white, good and evil, reward and punishment, beauty and ugliness, pleasure and pain, autonomy and obedience, particular and universal, one and many, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, happiness and misery. When one form has been exhausted, therefore, the most "natural" move is to its opposite, just as an eye that is tired of light leaps to the shade, an eye that is jaded with green tends to see a reddish after-image, and so on. Thus the development of the Concept, in one sense, takes place by a process of reaction formation. A philosophy based wholly on immediately intuited particulars (e.g. "sense certainty" in chapter 1, "self-certainty" in chapter 4, "pleasure" in chapter 5, and "pre-reflective family life" in chapter 6), once it has been seen as inadequate or incomplete, "naturally" moves to the opposite, a philosophy based wholly on "mediated" universals ("perception" in chapter 2, an abstract universal "soul" in chapter 4, "morality" in chapter 5, "civil law" in chapter 6). A philosophy too concerned with self leaps to a philosophy overly concerned with others, and a philosophy too obsessed with the passivity of consciousness in knowledge (empiricism) "naturally" moves on to a philosophy equally obsessed with the activity of the understanding (Kant and the German Idealists.)

Simple association and the play of "opposites" will explain only so much, however. The "dialectic" of the *Phenomenology* is not a tennis match but a journey; it doesn't just go back and forth, it moves around. How and why does it do this?

I insisted that the *Phenomenology* is not historical, but at the same time, Hegel intends his dialectic (as everyone knows) to apply to history as well. But history is contingent—"one damn thing after another," according to poet John Masefield. Philosophy consists of forms

and concepts, not facts and events. But there is an easy interpretation to this often troublesome duality, and Aristotle got it years ago. "Poetry", he said, "is more scientific and serious than history, because poetry gives us general truths, while history gives us only particular facts." What drives the dialectic, in other words, is the urge to increasingly general comprehension, which Hegel says is the "intrinsic principle" of human consciousness.

Suppose we were sitting down to write a textbook, an introduction to art through the ages, an introduction to a certain branch of mathematics, or an introduction to philosophy. One might, of course, take the easy way out and simply list the various persons and movements along with their discoveries or creations, in chronological or alphabetical order. But what is much more informative and thought-provoking is to tell a story in which the subject matter is the art, or the mathematics, or the philosophy itself, relegating individuals and movements to biographical footnotes. Thus one might well begin a course in history of art with Picasso or the modern minimalists; a discussion of mathematics might begin with a theorem that was not discovered until a few years ago, and a study in philosophy might start with an editorial in yesterday's newspaper just as well as with Thales and Anaximander.

After Picasso (let's say, his goat-head constructed out of a bicycle seat and handlebars) one could move quite easily to a contrast between art based on technical virtuosity and art based on "seeing" connections, or to the contrast between simplicity and complexity, comparing Picasso not only with minimalism but the stark classicism of early Greece and the early 19th century and certain medieval depictions of Christ, all in contrast to the decorative extravagance of late Greek Hellenism, the 18th-century rococo, and early abstract expressionism. In mathematics, one could present a sequence of proofs, each of which suggests (but by no means requires) another, and these may or may not approximate the historical sequence in which they were actually discussed, debated, and proved. And in philosophy, one can introduce "the free will problem" without any discussion whatever of its historical origins, bringing in various attempted solutions and objections to them without mentioning or only marginally referring to the philosophers or the times that produced them.

The crude dichotomy that has seemed so insurmountable to critics of Hegel and others,⁸¹ between the contingency of history and the

81. Notoriously Edmund Husserl, in his *Crisis in European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. D. Carr, (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), discussed with special regard to this question in Carr's *History and Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1978).

necessity of logic may not be much of a distinction after all. Of course things “happen” without regard for our expectations and one can indeed discuss abstract relations between concepts without any attempt whatsoever to instantiate these with examples from history. But—to return to Hegel’s central metaphor, the fact that a tree fails to grow (because of drought, bad soil, being abused by too many dogs) does not mean that it does not have its predetermined “logic” for growth. And the fact that in a botany class one can discuss in considerable detail the various stages of development and the mechanisms does not mean that the same discussion would make any sense at all if there were no such plant. What Hegel is doing in the *Phenomenology* is presenting the development of the forms of human experience, i.e. “the Concept,” as a sequence, in which the examples need not be in anything resembling historical order but nevertheless represent a sequence which can be found in time, if not invariably. It is a sequence which moves mainly by “opposites,” and its general direction is the direction of increasing generality.

In the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel tells us that the life of spirit and the development of the forms or concepts of consciousness follow a path of development more or less parallel to the conceptual development of an individual—in fact, he tells us that the development of the individual follows the stages of Spirit that have already “been made level with toil.” (“The single individual must also pass through the formative stages of universal Spirit so far as their content is concerned, but as shapes which Spirit has already left behind” (*Phenomenology*, 28).) The evolutionary analogies should be obvious here, despite the fact that (fifty years before Darwin) Hegel did not see through to what *we* (in retrospect) see as an almost obvious move. But it is this same retrospect that gives Hegel his confidence in describing as a process of development a process which (so far as we know) has happened only once—namely, the conceptual evolution of “the human mind.”

Is there a universal “logic” in our conceptual development, a path which must be followed? We hardly have a sampling to show us this, and what approximations we have (e.g. cross-cultural studies) tend to be ethnocentric and biased.⁸² Discussing plants, we now can refer with considerable specificity to the genetics and biochemistry of development as an explanation of growth, but it is not difficult to imagine that Hegel and Goethe in their time could only appeal, as Aristotle had appealed 2500 years before them, to some vague “internal prin-

82. For a good discussion of the problems involved here, see Robert R. Sears, “Transcultural Variables and Conceptual Equivalence,” in *Problems of Cross-Cultural Research* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1955).

ciple." And indeed, that is where Hegel was (and we are too) with regard to the ambitious question of the "logic" of conceptual development. We suppose that we did indeed develop by such and such a path. We discern minor, maybe major, variations in the development of intelligence in other cultures. But the most we can say is that it must have been "necessary" for us to develop more or less as we did. But it is the "more or less" that is the rub; how can we know what variations are possible? Or what alternative conceptual frameworks or forms of intelligence might be available? These are monstrous questions, and we are no closer to answering them than Hegel was. But he was, in his hesitant way, the philosopher who asked them, 170 years ago.

Does this mean that there is no account to be given of "the development of the Concept"? Not at all. We can, at least, present an all-encompassing picture of the forms of human experience, in an order that lets us see, if not a precise hierarchy of stages, at least the way that tutored consciousness tends to move from one form or another. It is not mere history. It is not, as so often suggested, a series of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in which a form is shown to be self-contradictory and then rejected in favor of another.⁸³ It is rather, as one might write the history of philosophy, a discursive presentation and criticism of various forms, movements, problems and their proposed solutions; it is a quasi-history, a sort of logic, but—strictly speaking—neither.

No history of philosophy is "complete," in one sense; even Copleston edits out "minor" philosophers who do not fit in his table of contents. It is never wholly coherent, since the John Locke who wrote the second *Treatise on Government* is best treated in one chapter and the John Locke who wrote the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in another. The story will always be disjointed, but the alternative—to follow a single thread out of context like Lovejoy's *Great Chain of Being*—is much less satisfactory. And when it is the representations of life as a whole that are being represented, rather than the more or less self-contained study of a single "discipline," one can be sure that the canvas will be all the more cluttered, disjointed, and that everyone will find something that has been under-presented. (Marxists, for example, have complained ever since Marx that the forms of power and economic need play too little role in the *Phenomenology*, and the forms of philosophy too much.)

83. Actually, it is said to be *aufgehoben*, "lifted up" or "cancelled and preserved." But like so much of Hegel's language, this term has often been snatched from its contexts to do the work of analysis; all it really says is that a form is never simply rejected but analyzed, evaluated, enlarged, or replaced by one akin to it (even its opposite).

If, because of the likelihood of criticism and the *hubris* of such an endeavor, we have tended to give up on such “speculative” history and philosophy, that is surely our loss. Because the point is that we do think that way in any case, encapsulating the whole of human experience into a platitude or two, the whole course of human history represented by a single incident—Auschwitz or Munich or the expulsion from Eden—and we summarize the whole of human nature with a simple word such as “selfishness” or “insecurity” or “love.” And if both historians and philosophers prefer to pooh-pooh the Hegelian enterprise and turn instead to more humble endeavors, then who is going to provide us with the Big Picture, which provides the background if not also the “logic” of our thinking? Who is going to select those forms of consciousness that are essential to our experience, that define the way we think about ourselves and our place in the world? But here we come back to the historicist viewpoint that Hegel himself always hesitated to defend; the “development of the Concept” is neither history nor logic but, in every case, *a way of perceiving the present*, a *myth*—in the classical sense, a story based on “the facts” but by no means confined to them in which our present form of consciousness is given some meaning—a history and, perhaps, a sense of destiny.⁸⁴ And if Hegel’s point is to show us, for each of the forms he discusses in the *Phenomenology*, that it is incomplete, the proper conclusion for the historicist Hegel (anathema to the absolute idealist Hegel) is that *our* form of consciousness is incomplete too. The development of the Concept, in other words, is just as Socrates said it should be—the increasing appreciation of our own ignorance, and what we do *not* yet understand.

The Structure of The Phenomenology of Spirit, or Lack of It

The passion exists in every one of us. We do not want our experience to be ours alone. —Isaac Bashevis Singer

How should one read the *Phenomenology*? One must read, Evelyn Wood notwithstanding, line by line, page by page, if not word by word. But there is a sense in which the traditional Hegel-pundits are right when

84. Again, one should point out the absurdity of that common Hegel-interpretation that makes him not only unconcerned about the future but unwilling to admit its existence. *Destiny* is an important ingredient in the *Phenomenology* as it was in some of his earlier writings and in the temper of the times in general. Goethe was always talking about “fate” and “destiny,” for example, and it is Kierkegaard in 1846, not Hegel in 1806, who tends to live life “backwards.”

they say: "You won't understand anything until you've completed it all"—though not in the self-serving sense in which this is usually uttered (namely, "You have no right to complain until the end of the course, and not then either"). The book is a representation, and you cannot appreciate it with just part of the picture (as one can, perhaps, with the first two-thirds of Kant's first *Critique* or a few well-chosen arguments from Hume's *Treatise*). But if it is essential to complete the whole, it does not follow that it is necessary to follow the book from beginning to end. I would argue that the general trail of "Spirit," which most commentators take to be the essence of the *Phenomenology* is of relatively little importance; it is marred by the most obscure transitions and unbreachable continuities and in any case it is the product of philosophical ambitions which are no longer of any interest or significance to us, except perhaps negatively. What is of importance are the particular transitions from form to form, motivated in every case by a certain discomfort within each form which have to be investigated a case at a time, rather than in one grand declaration about contradiction, "*aufheben*" and "the realization of the Concept."

It is in the smaller sequences—the first chapters, the Master-Slave dialectic, the sequence of "ethical" theories, and the long chapter on "Spirit"—where we see the structure of "dialectic" at work. But even *within* those sequences, we should be extremely cautious about joining the army of commentators (and often Hegel too) who speak of "higher" syntheses and movement "up" or "forward." The *Phenomenology* is indeed a movement, or rather a set of movements, an odyssey, as Hegel later said it was, a wandering, like *Faust*, with skips and jumps and slow meanderings. Those who take Hegel at his word and look for a "ladder" or a path or yellow brick road to the Absolute are bound to be disappointed. The *Phenomenology* is a conceptual landscape, through which Hegel leads us somewhat at his whim.⁸⁵

85. In a letter of July 30, 1808, Schelling wrote (to K.J.H. Windischmann) "... it would be very wrong ... to let him get away with the manner in which he wants to make a general standard of what is in accord with and granted to his individual nature" (Kaufmann, 323).

Chapter Five

Hegel's Own View of the *Phenomenology*: The Preface

When Hegel had finished the *Phenomenology*, he reflected retrospectively on the philosophical enterprise and wrote the "Preface," different from the introduction. . . . It is a strange demonstration, for he says above all, "Don't take me seriously in a preface. The real philosophical work is what I have just written, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. And if I speak to you outside of what I have written, . . . these marginal comments cannot have the value of the work itself. Furthermore, I am going to write a very different work, which will be a speculative logic." The "Preface" is thus situated between Hegel's main two works, . . . the two works Hegel represents in his Preface. —Jean Hyppolite, "The Structure of Philosophic Language in the 'Preface' of Hegel's *Phenomenology*."

We have been trying to say with some clarity what it is that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to be, what it is supposed to do, and what its famous "dialectical" structure is supposed to represent. But Hegel provides us with his own view of the book, in an infamously difficult piece of writing which serves as the Preface. This was written (like most prefaces) after he had completed the writing of the book and (also like most prefaces) with a transparent attitude of defensiveness. At one and the same time, it is an attempt to protect himself from criticism, to make clear—as the text itself does not—exactly what he is trying to do in the volume, which by his own calculation was twice too long and grossly disproportioned, and to make it evident—if the language and complexity of the book do not already do so—just how important a work this is to be. But in reading the Preface it is important to remember that this is more of a statement about what did *not* find its way into the text than a description of what is to follow. It is, for example, an introduction to the material that was originally to be

the main text of the *Phenomenology*, but had to be postponed, instead, to his next work, the *Science of Logic* (1812). Much of what he says in the later parts of the Preface (about “speculative thinking” and “Science”) is more properly preliminary to the next book than to this one. If the *Phenomenology* is an “introduction” to the later system, it is only the Preface that serves this role, for the *Phenomenology* itself had taken on a life of its own. With this in mind, we might well remember T.S. Eliot’s warning about his own poetry—“I am in no better position than anyone else to know what my work means.” We should not assume that the Preface is only, or even primarily, our entry to the *Phenomenology*. Indeed, it may even be an obstacle on our way to it.

Part I: A Preface to the Preface: Philosophical Truth

Whoever has understood the Preface to the *Phenomenology* has understood Hegel. —Hermann Glockner

By far, the best part of the *Phenomenology* is its Preface. —W. Kaufmann

It has often been said, and recanted as a matter of routine, that anyone who understands the Preface to the *Phenomenology* thereby understands Hegel’s philosophy. In a sense not intended, this may be true. That is, one cannot possibly understand the Preface without already understanding Hegel’s very difficult philosophy—and then, his *Logic* rather than the *Phenomenology*.¹ The Preface was written in even greater haste than the rest of the book, when the author was already removed from his text, tired of it, glib about it, and in a hurry to see it in print. Consequently, it is an obscure and rambling document, with a few spectacular aphorisms and hints of the bold experiment that follows, but virtually impossible to read without frustration, if not indignation as well. There are topics, discussed without any aid to the reader, which presuppose the very specialized jargon of the German Idealists—and even then, Schelling himself complained that he did not know how Hegel was using his key terms. There are allusions made to figures not named, even though it is quite clear that Hegel has someone very particular in mind. The language is obscure to begin with, but Hegel soon finds a special delight in twisting his terms around in playful paradoxes, e.g. his notorious use of the con-

1. “If P then Q” is equivalent to “If not-Q, then not-P”; understanding the Preface is a consequence rather than a sufficient condition for understanding Hegel.

trast "in itself" and "for itself" and his dubious use of the circle metaphor ("it is at the end what it was at the beginning," whereas the end and beginning are in fact quite distinct). And worst of all, he teases his readers without satisfying them (but then again, one cannot get satisfaction from a preface). He taunts his critics, blaming them in advance for blaming him instead of themselves if/when they do not understand his work (*Phenomenology*, 71). And he writes in a style that is largely ironic, often sarcastic, sometimes stating that he will not do such-and-such, and then doing it even while denying that he will do it. For example, there is the opening of the Preface itself, the despair of every beginning student of Hegel:

It is customary to preface a work with an explanation of the author's aim, why he wrote the book, and the relationship in which he believes it to stand to other earlier or contemporary treatises on the same subject. In the case of a philosophical work, however, such an explanation seems not only superfluous but, in view of the nature of the subject-matter, even inappropriate and misleading. For whatever might appropriately be said about philosophy in a preface—say a historical *statement* of the main drift and the point of view, the general content and results, a string of random assertions and assurances about truth—none of this can be accepted as the way in which to expound philosophical truth. (1/3/67/6)²

But in this very paragraph, the author states his purpose, to "expound philosophical Truth (*die philosophische Wahrheit*).” And as every reader of the commentaries is well aware, the rest of the Preface is riddled with ironic and sometimes nasty comments about the "circumstances" and "other treatments of the same topic," especially Schelling and his other contemporaries.

It is in the Preface, much more than in the text itself, that Hegel's central indecision becomes most apparent—his awkward and sometimes confused mixture of absolute idealism and historicism. It is here that he tries to make up for his most "unscientific" performance in the text, not by apologizing but by belligerently reasserting its scientific qualities. This makes for an awkward stance and some uncomfortable reading, as Hegel pontificates as he never does in the text about the importance of a philosophical system and the woeful inad-

2. All references to the Preface of the *PG* will be given in quadruplicate: the first reference is to the Miller translation, on which the quotations are based. The numbers are *paragraph* numbers, not page numbers. The second reference is to the German edition of the *PG*: for the Preface only, I have used Johann Schultz's edition of 1832 (Berlin: Duncker und Humboldt), vol. 2 of *Werke*. The third reference is to the old Baillie translation (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), and the fourth is to Walter Kaufmann's very excellent translation, printed separately as *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). See also Richard Schacht's commentary in *Philosophical Studies* vol. 23, (1972), 1–31.

equacies of those philosophers who have failed or who have not even tried to construct one. Here too Hegel tries to cover his tracks, emphasizing the *necessity* of the route he has provided for us, reiterating in a mixture of metaphors our systematic ascension to the absolute standpoint of philosophy and *Geist*. He thus denies in effect the most significant single "result" of the *Phenomenology*—not the Absolute nor even the self-realization of Spirit but the recognition of the richness of alternative "forms of consciousness," alternative conceptual frameworks and life styles, which may not in the end lend themselves to "absolute" resolution.

The general theme of the Preface is: philosophy is the presentation of philosophical or "absolute" truth; but philosophical truth, as opposed to "casual assertions and assurances," must be "systematic" and "developmental" in form. And, as Science, it must be conceptually articulate. Hegel does tell us, contrary to his initial announcement, the relationship of his own theory of Truth to others of his time and before him: his is fully adequate and theirs are not. He has brought philosophy to its fruition and its time-honored and time-worn problems to their resolution. The philosophers of the past, while not being misguided or "wrong," have tended to be "one-sided" in their theories. Hegel's contemporaries, however, are worse than "one-sided." With all the resources of the history of philosophy and the collective experiences of enlightened mankind at their disposal, they have produced philosophies which are mere "personal opinions," "abstract formulas," or merely "enthusiastic" appeals to common sense or religious feeling. But Hegel's complaints against his colleagues and his sympathetic criticism of his predecessors are not merely comparisons of his own theory with alternative theories. These are essential to his theory itself. To say that philosophy must be "systematic" is to say, in part, that it must account for the one-sided truth of every other philosophy. And to say that philosophy is "developmental" is to say, in part, that a philosophical theory is never an isolated hypothesis but always a response to and a development of other philosophical positions. Philosophical truth can only be understood within the context of philosophy and its history.

Most philosophers of all persuasions would or could be forced to agree that philosophical problems are always inherited problems, and that philosophical theories are to be judged, essentially, according to the degree to which they resolve or satisfy problems and demands which alternative theories have left unresolved and unsatisfied. This is not to say that philosophy is a "closed system" of problems and solutions which are of interest only to those with philosophical train-

ing. To the contrary, it is to insist that every philosophical theory, whether explicitly or not, finds its presuppositions and intentions in other philosophical concerns and theories, and that every problem, traced back toward its roots, will find its origins and ambitions in the gut-level problems of human existence, which is, like philosophy, essentially conceptual, and therefore philosophical, even if naïvely and implicitly. This is why a technical philosophical problem, wrenched from its philosophical and human context, often appears dry and “irrelevant,” like an inedible and already dried-out fruit that has been plucked from its tree. It is also why, in the Preface, Hegel rightly insists that a philosophical theory of Truth cannot be baldly presented, a “naked result,” and be expected to have any significance. A philosophical theory is intelligible only within the over-all philosophical and experiential context within which certain problems have arisen, been attacked, and partially solved but remain, perhaps raising new and more difficult problems, have become reformulated and twisted by new conceptual advances, partially “cancelled,” partially transcended (“*aufgehoben*”), and have finally emerged at that stage of “development” in which the current theory constitutes an attempt to resolve them. Thus, from an “absolute idealist” standpoint, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is a philosophical theory of Truth which is presented in less than fifteen pages, the “absolute knowing” of the *Phenomenology* (779–92). It is the development of the context within which that theory can be seen to be an adequate resolution of various problems that takes up the other several hundred pages. But that is why philosophical truth cannot be stated in a preface. “The Truth is not only the result”: “The truth is the whole, in its process of development.” The Truth (*die Wahrheit*) is in the (alleged) unity of the book—not in its conclusion or in any of its parts (Preface included). But then again, from the historicist point of view, there is no Truth, in this sense, at all, only the truths (*die Wahre*) of the various parts. But the Truth is, in any case, the goal of philosophy—the entire history of human thought, in fact, and it is to be understood only in terms of that history.

It is in the Preface that we are first struck by the bewildering mixture of metaphors that supposedly define the remainder of the book. Foremost among them, however, is the *Bildung* metaphor, to which we are introduced at the very beginning of the text, in a particularly striking passage;

The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it in-

stead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole. (*Phenomenology*, 2)

The odd mixture of botany and logic is only half tongue-in-cheek; the other half is extremely serious. For it is Hegel's whole point that knowledge, experience, consciousness develop as organic wholes, through various stages or "moments" in a process that, at any given point, might well seem as if it were complete in itself. The botanical metaphor also gives us a clue to what Hegel means by "contradiction," not logical contradiction but simply "difference"; a bud cannot be a blossom or a fruit at the same time, but yet it is all three.

Elsewhere in the Preface, the *Bildung* metaphor appears in the image of an embryo, a newborn child, several more tree images, the education of the individual, and the education of mankind. But it is interrupted at irregular intervals with the circle metaphor and a steady insistence that philosophy can only be realized as Science. It is in the soil of Science that our philosophical oak will grow, and Hegel, of course, will be our gardener. As we read through this remarkably rambling and ill-organized document, however, what strikes us most of all is its defensiveness. "Philosophy must be Scientific," Hegel declares, and it is the point of the Preface to declare that it is so. To which Walter Kaufmann rightly replies, "In the preface he pleaded belatedly that philosophy must become scientific—an unlikely epithet for the *Phenomenology*."

The purpose of the *Phenomenology* is complex and ambitious; the point of the Preface is rude and self-serving. It announces a serious effort to come to grips with the so-called problem of truth in philosophy, but it too often tends to be nasty, defensive, arrogant, and, ultimately, misleading. The Preface does not tell us what we will find in the text so much as it tells us what we *ought* to find there. It includes concise aphorisms, but, as Kaufmann has pointed out,³ they are often embedded in obscure and near-impossible sentences and always embellished to make them look "scientific." Indeed, the point of the Preface, taken down to essentials, can be easily stated: to insist that good philosophy is scientific, that this particular book *is* scientific, that it succeeds, as others do not, in demonstrating that "Spirit" is everything and integrates within it the realms of nature and human will. But the Preface itself, Hegel admits, does not actually do this. Hegel

3. Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 364.

instead uses the Preface to chastise his public, his colleagues, his competitors, and state in his insufferably dense prose the epic importance of his own first book and the supposedly even greater importance of his next one (still ten years away).

In what follows, I will try to pick out the key arguments and claims of the Preface, by way of a commentary that will concentrate most of all on the opening paragraphs.

[Or, you might consider simply moving straight on to the analysis of the text itself (chapters 6–11) and take Hegel at his word, that “the truth is not to be found in a preface.”]

But first, here is Hegel's own table of contents (for the Preface only):

The element of the True is the Notion and its true shape is scientific system.

The state of spiritual culture at the present time.

The principle of Science is not the completion of Science: objections to formalism.

The Absolute is Subject: the meaning of this.

The element of knowledge.

The elevation of consciousness into that element is the Phenomenology of Spirit.

The transformation of picture-thoughts and familiar ideas into thoughts; and these into Notions.

To what extent is the Phenomenology of Spirit negative, or how is the false contained in it?

Historical and mathematical truth. The nature of philosophical truth and its method: objections to schematizing formalism.

Requirement for the study of philosophy.

The negative attitude of ratiocinative thinking, its positive attitude, and its subject.

Philosophizing by the light of nature: sound common sense; the inspiration of genius.

Conclusion: the relation of the author to his public.

—(*Phenomenology*, xxxiii)

The Preface

... roars like a romantic symphony. —Gustav Emil Muller

Hegel begins (1/3/67/6) by telling us that philosophical Truth is not to be found in a Preface, that a mere statement of aim is all but worthless since, as Kant had also argued, philosophy is not a body of knowledge or a set of conclusions but an activity, which one learns only by *doing*. A preface, accordingly, is not a symphony nor even an overture, but

the program one is handed at the door before the performance, full of advertisements and some brief indication of what is to come. But the program is not the performance, and the statement that one would *like* to arrive at a certain conclusion is not philosophy. Thus Hegel ends his Preface, as he begins it, with a barbed taunt at those who “read reviews of philosophical works, even prefaces and first paragraphs” but not the work itself. (70/56/128/106)

With that damper on our enthusiasm, we can say that the first paragraph of the Preface does, obliquely, tell us the goal of the book—“philosophical Truth,” and its method too, which is “Science” (*Wissenschaft*). This too is defined for us, obliquely; it is not a mere “aggregate of information,” including the history of philosophy and the knowledge of a variety of philosophical systems.⁴ Philosophy, Hegel tells us, “moves essentially in the element of universality”—that is, it deals in general principles. But it requires thorough knowledge of “particulars” too. In other words, one must have a working knowledge of the details of the history of philosophy in order to do philosophy, but the actual doing is the formulation of those general principles, which accounts for that history as a unified and ongoing activity. Here Hegel introduces the first of his many organic metaphors: in anatomy, we can be familiar with the parts, but we do not really understand them unless we know how they function in the living organism; so too, we can be familiar with the history of philosophy and the variety of philosophical viewpoints, but we do not understand philosophy until we understand how these function together, as parts of a living enterprise.

The second paragraph also introduces an organic metaphor—in this case, the more central botanical imagery of the metamorphosis of a flower bud into a blossom into a fruit (see p. 241). This *Bildung* metaphor is then applied to the history of philosophy, which is to be viewed not as a conflict but rather as a development of views,

in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole. But he who rejects a philosophical system [i.e. the new philosopher] does not usually comprehend what he is doing in this way; and he who grasps the contradiction between them [i.e. the historian of philosophy] does not, as a general rule, know how to free it from its one-sidedness, or maintain it in its freedom by recognizing the reciprocally necessary moments that take shape as a conflict and seeming incompatibility. (2/4/68/8)

The mixture of epistemological and biological metaphors is all-important for Hegel. The idea of the “growth” of truth, its gradual

4. Cf. Hegel's criticism of Reinhold's “historicism” in his *Differenz*-essay of 1801. See Chapter 3.

realization through a series of transformations (namely, the whole history of human thought), is the whole point behind the odd structure (or lack of it) of the *Phenomenology*. But more specifically, his point here is that *truth* and *falsity*, where philosophical viewpoints are concerned, are not "opposites"; a philosophical doctrine is not literally "false," since it is not an attempt to describe a state of affairs to which it does or does not accurately correspond. It is rather a representation of the whole of reality, and its inadequacy is more likely to be that of being "one-sided," incomplete, not well thought-out. For example, if one looks back at the movement in British Empiricism, from Locke to Berkeley to Hume, for instance, one sees quite clearly that this is not a matter of one philosopher refuting another and replacing the refuted philosophy with his own; the three rather represent a sequential working out of the details and implications (not all of them favorable) of the empiricist program of Locke, which in turn was a reaction to the dominant philosophy of "innate ideas" that ruled at the time, and all of these represent a shared attempt to understand the origins of human understanding. So too the sequence of Kant-Fichte-Schelling-Hegel should be seen—as we have come to see it as a matter of course—as a working out of the transcendental idealist program initiated in Kant (which in turn was a development from Leibniz-Berkeley-Hume) as a shared attempt to formulate a unified view of the whole of human experience. And if one takes it for granted (as Hegel and his friends did) that this program is the *right* program (in fact, absolutely right) then this image in effect puts one above criticism; Hegel is not just stating *his* philosophy. He is rather bringing to fruition the whole philosophical tradition of the West.

Later in the Preface (39/30/98f/58f) Hegel elaborates this point about truth and falsity:

39. "True" and "false" belong among those determinate notions which are held to be inert and wholly separate essences, one here and one there, each standing fixed and isolated from the other, with which it has nothing in common. Against this view it must be maintained that truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made.

In other words, Hegel is distinguishing two different contexts of talking about truth; one is the everyday context in which we say that a certain statement is true (e.g. "the cat is on the mat" is true if and only if the cat is on the mat). The other context is the esoteric philosophical context in which one evaluates various philosophical systems and develops a theory of Truth. In other words, what is it that makes a philosophical statement—or a system of statements—true? Not correspondence to "the facts" (since any number of opposing philosoph-

ical viewpoints might be based on precisely the same facts) and certainly not fidelity to our ordinary use of the words “true” and “false.” Indeed, it is our special use of these words in philosophy that raises the question. (Thus Hegel sometimes distinguishes the two by calling them *das Wahre* and *die Wahrheit* respectively.)⁵

The most profound example of “one-sided” philosophical viewpoints, according to Hegel, is to be found in Kant’s antinomies. For example, the first pair of antinomies is,

—The world has a beginning in space and time.

—The world does not have a beginning in space and time.⁶

Hegel would agree with Kant that each of these theses can be defended by a valid argument with sound premises, but where Kant claims such antinomies prove the “illusory” nature of pure reason by trying to give us knowledge beyond the realm of experience, Hegel holds that these are not actually contradictory theses but rather complementary. They are both moments in the more perspicacious “speculative” view of reality which he argues in the *Logic* and *within* the realm of experience. Neither is false; both are true, that is, partially true—perspectives on the Truth (*die Wahrheit*) from different viewpoints.

Hegel here (3/5/69/10) repeats his demand that a mere statement of aim is virtually worthless, and to think that stating one’s conclusion is already to state one’s philosophy (as in “What’s your philosophy?”) is nothing but “a device for evading the real issue, a way of creating an impression of hard work and serious commitment to the problem, while actually sparing oneself both.” In other words, philosophy is nothing but the doing of it, and though one must come to some conclusion, to be sure, it is the thinking, not that conclusion, that is philosophy’s “truth.”⁷

This point is made by means of another organic metaphor, this one a return to the anatomical imagery of paragraph one. Hegel says that “the aim itself is a lifeless universal . . . a mere drive . . . and the naked result is the corpse that has left the guiding tendency behind it.” The

5. The same distinction can be found in Heidegger’s “The Essence of Truth” essay, and in P.F. Strawson’s attack on J.L. Austin in their famous “truth” symposium. The stamped coin image, Walter Kaufmann points out, is an allusion to Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*: “Truth, Truth! He wants it readymade . . . as if Truth were a coin” (WK, p. 414). The point becomes central to the discussion of Truth in the *Logic*, years later, where once again Hegel makes a firm distinction between truth and mere “correctness” (*Richtigkeit*). In the latter, criteria for truth (“truth conditions”) are already taken for granted. In the former, philosophical context, the criteria for truth are precisely what is an issue.

6. CPR, B. 454.

7. Hegel would include in this list of evasions the discipline (vanity?) of comparing the work of other philosophers, as in his own earlier essays. In his own opinion, it was only with the PG that he began actually *doing* philosophy, as opposed to just writing about it.

urge to completeness ("the Absolute") means nothing except through the actual effort of trying to develop a complete ("systematic") philosophy, and the mere statement of completeness—e.g. "All is One," out of context of the various philosophical efforts that lead up to it—is a pointless utterance. (Thus our disdain for the thoughtless platitudes of pop philosophy, even when they are identical to the conclusions of the most profound thinkers of the age.)

The *Bildung* metaphor is presented as such in paragraph 4 (4/6/70/10), though unfortunately both the Miller and Baillie translations hide this from us:

4. Culture⁸ and its laborious emergence from the immediacy of substantial life must always begin by getting acquainted with *general* principles and points of view, so as at first to work up to a *general conception* of the real issue, as well as learning to support and refute the general conception with reasons; then to apprehend the rich and concrete abundance [of life] by differential classification; and finally to give accurate instruction and pass serious judgement upon it. From its very beginning, culture must leave room for the earnestness of life in its concrete richness; this leads the way to an experience of the real issue. And even when the real issue has been penetrated to its depths by serious speculative effort, this kind of knowing and judging will still retain its appropriate place in ordinary conversation.

Here the *Bildung* metaphor is explicitly educational, from "the immediacy of substantial life" (*der Unmittelbarkeit des substantiellen Lebens*) to "a general conception" or "thought" (*Gedanke*). To "work oneself up" from one to the other requires gaining knowledge of universal principles, in other words, doing some philosophy. And this in turn requires what Miller translates as "serious speculative effort" (*der Ernst des Begriffs*), but which should much more importantly be recognized as Hegel's first introduction of the Concept (*der Begriff*), which is the philosophical side of "Spirit" and the protagonist of the book. Philosophy and philosophical truth, in a word, require "the Concept," de-

8. The difference in alternative translations of this word is instructive: Baillie and Miller translate "*Bildung*" as *culture*, which is surely misleading; Kaufmann translates it as *education*, where we should translate it, more in line with the cultivation metaphor, as *development*. On such differences the tone of the work depends. Similarly, "*der Unmittelbarkeit des substantiellen Lebens*" is translated by Baillie "the immediacy of naïve psychical life," by Kaufmann as "the immediacy of the substance of life." Hegel's meaning is, I believe, everyday life in which we are caught up in daily tasks and material, as opposed to spiritual, concerns. Baillie's notion of "psychical" is uncalled for and introduces a dangerous empiricist bent which Hegel does not intend. Kaufmann's "the substance of life" is risky because, given that Hegel will soon say that the substance is spirit, the contrast between the everyday material and the philosophically spiritual life is lost. It is also important to point out that "*Gedanke*" above, translated by Kaufmann as *idea* and by Baillie as *thought*, might be translated either way, but with considerable differences. In the *Logic*, *thoughts* are the vehicle throughout, conceptual but not necessarily actualized or explicit: The *Idea*, on the other hand, is the very end of the *Logic*, thought fully spiritual and explicit to itself. In the present context, either will fit, but the difference between them is enormous.

mand articulation and “reasons” (*Grunden*). This may seem obvious to us, but it had to be argued in Hegel’s day, particularly against the Romantics (who will be much abused in passages to come) who insisted instead that “the Absolute” would not be known through articulation but only “felt” through emotion and intuition.

In this same paragraph Hegel insists on the unity of “the earnestness of life in its concrete richness” and “education” or philosophical effort. Thus philosophy must never be confined simply to the study (as it was for David Hume, who could argue against the possibility of knowing the existence of the external world and then sit down to a roast beef dinner), nor should philosophy ever be taken as a *substitute* for life. (Thus Hegel later said of Schelling that he did philosophy instead of living.)

“The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of it” (5/6/71/12). This is one of those few brief statements that could be used to summarize the entire Preface. This is, indeed, the main point of the Preface, that philosophy requires a scientific system and Hegel has provided us with such a system. We have already discussed these concepts “system” and “Science” in some detail (chapter 4b, “Science, System and Dialectic”), and may repeat here only the demand that (1) a system must show the interconnection of various forms and claims, in particular, the integration of the twin realms of “nature” and “freedom” (*à la* Kant) and the developmental relationships governing the whole history of philosophy and conceptual thought. (2) A scientific system must be articulate, spelled out and discursive, argumentative, a “demonstration” of its conclusions and not just a claim that one “knows” (through feeling or special intuition) that they are true. (3) “Science” (*Wissenschaft*) does not mean what we mean by it, “natural science” (physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, etc.) but rather, as in Aristotle, a system of *necessary* propositions, not empirical findings.

Here too Hegel announces, “what I have set myself to do,” namely, “to help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science.” He puns on the literal Greek meaning of “philosophy”—“*philein sophia*”—“the love of wisdom” and says that, as Science, “it can lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing.” But this un-Socratic aim is precisely what the historicist Hegel would deny to the *Phenomenology* itself; its conclusion, “the Absolute” or “absolute knowing” is that philosophy will always be an effort, an activity, rather than a result already obtained.

Here too Hegel introduces the key to his *Bildung* metaphor, the idea of an “inner necessity,” “that knowing should be scientific,” that is, articulate and aim at total comprehension. In his initial discussion

of scientific explanation in chapter 3, for example, he considers at length the urge of scientists to unify all phenomena and theories under a single principle, similar to Newton's laws of motion and theory of gravitation or in fulfillment of Einstein's search for a "unified field theory." He claims that the urge to such total comprehension lies in the very nature of consciousness itself, and so too in philosophy, the only ultimately satisfying viewpoint will be one which is "systematic," all comprehending, and in effect, therefore, the end of philosophy.

The idea of inner necessity is contrasted with external necessity, "accidental matters of person and motivation." In philosophy, this would be the desire to be published, or please a prince, or render up the most persuasive system to one's colleagues. But, Hegel assures us, internal and external necessities are ultimately the same—a strong claim which appears again many years later in his lectures on the philosophy of history. (Thus, Napoleon's personal ambitions matched precisely with the "cunning of reason" which used him for its own intentions.) Their identity is to be found "in the shape in which time sets forth the sequential existence of its moments"—in other words, in history, and in particular, in the history of philosophy. Hegel adds that "to demonstrate the necessity of the aim" (for total comprehension through philosophy) would be "at the same time the accomplishment of it." In other words, to recognize that the whole of philosophy has always aimed at an all-encompassing system is to realize that all-encompassing system. The Truth is the recognition that we all seek the one universal Truth.

THE (EMBATTLED) SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

We have completed only the first five paragraphs, but the over-all point of the Preface is already before us; the emphasis on system and Science, the organic *Bildung* metaphors and the insistence on actually doing philosophy instead of just talking about it or summarizing its results, on going through the whole history of conceptual thought (or *the Concept*) in order to bring to fruition its underlying aims and inner principles. Much of what follows is repetition.

To lay down that the true shape of truth is scientific—or, what is the same thing, to maintain that truth has only the Concept [*Begriff*] as the element of its existence—seems, I know, to contradict a view which is in our time as prevalent as it is pretentious.

Here begins Hegel's prolonged attack on Romanticism and intuitionism. He contrasts his own philosophy, which recognizes "the Concept"

as the key to the realization of the Absolute, with those who insist that “the Absolute is not supposed to be comprehended (*begriffen*) but it is to be felt and intuited (*gefühlt und angeschaut*)” through feeling and intuition (*Gefühl und Anschauung*).” His opponents would include Jacobi, later Schleiermacher and others who explicitly insisted that the Absolute could not be known (following Kant who called it a “regulative idea”) but only intuited and felt (which Kant did not believe). But it would also include Schelling, for whom “intellectual intuition” remained the ultimate court of appeal. In this context, it is instructive to look at Schelling’s first letter to Hegel, after reading the Preface:

I confess that so far I do not comprehend the sense in which you oppose the *Concept* to intuition. Surely you could not mean anything else by it than what you and I used to call the Idea, whose nature it is to have one side from which it is Concept and one from which it is intuition.⁹

Hegel had written Schelling that he was surely not attacking him, but the evidence to the contrary is formidable. Hegel’s unmistakable reference to Schelling’s system as “a boring show of diversity,” his remark that “The Idea . . . remains in its primitive condition, if its development involves nothing more than repetition of the same formula” and his sarcastic reference to “monochromatic formalism” must have given Schelling ample reason to be offended. And finally, the ultimate insult; Hegel refers to the ultimate principle of both Fichte’s and Schelling’s philosophies, “the $A = A$ ” or “all is one,” and calls it “an abyss of vacuity,” as if “to palm off the Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black.”¹⁰

In the midst of this largely unwarranted sarcasm and in any case probably strained sense of opposition, Hegel gives us, “besides,” what is probably the best single summary of the “Spirit” of the *Phenomenology*, which we have quoted before (11/10/75/20):

11. Besides, it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born—so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving

9. From Munich, Nov. 2, 1807. Again, I have in every instance translated “*Begriff*” as “Concept,” replacing Miller’s “Notion” wherever it appears in the *PG*.

10. The phrase “ $A = A$ ” comes immediately from the German Idealists, but ultimately it is taken from Leibniz, who used it (less obscurely) to refer to the identity of all true propositions in God’s knowledge of the world. The “night” image may have been taken from Parmenides.

bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world.

The sunburst, of course, is the new world of the French Revolution and Enlightenment liberalism, now coming home to Germany. But it is also the sun of Truth in Plato, a new world of thought, a new way of thinking, no longer in terms of provincial beliefs and "positive" (authoritarian) religions. It is a world of thought based on reason and criticism, and in this light, we might note Hegel's old letter to Schelling, "From the Kantian system and its completion I expect a revolution in Germany . . ." ¹¹ Here is Kant's system about to be completed, and here, along with Napoleon, is the philosophical revolution in Germany.

It is in the midst of sarcasm and the strained opposition between "the Concept" and intuition that Hegel also introduces (7/7/72/12) his all-important concept of *Geist*, Spirit. "Spirit," Hegel tells us, "has now got beyond the substantial life it formerly led in the element of thought, that is beyond the immediacy of faith, beyond the satisfaction and security of the certainty that consciousness then had, of its reconciliation with the essential being, and of that being's presence both within and without." Hegel is here talking about the traditional notion of the "spiritual" as a *religious* conception, of "Spirit" as the Holy Spirit, which is at one and the same time "within and without" us. But this traditional security, based on unquestioning ("immediate") faith, is finished. Religious faith is passé since the Enlightenment, and in desperation people now turn "away from the empty husks" of religion (which Hegel himself had criticized so virulently in his early essays) and turn to philosophy, not for "knowledge" but "for the recovery . . . of that lost sense of solid and substantial being." And so the Romantics, who are also concerned with a return to "the good old days" and "that old fashioned religion," provide them with promises of "the 'beautiful,' the 'holy,' the 'eternal,' 'religion,' and 'love'" as "the bait required to arouse the desire to bite." But this is, Hegel insists, mere "insubstantial reflection of itself into itself"—in other words, an ultimately vacuous sense of self, which provides "edification rather than insight" ¹² and "not the Concept but ecstasy, not the cold march of necessity . . . but the ferment of enthusiasm."

11. From Bern, April 16, 1795.

12. Cf. Kierkegaard's "Edifying Discourses," which were an intentional slap at just this Hegelian *caveat*.

What Hegel wants to do, on the other hand, is not to “return to the old conception of Spirit” (like the Romantics Novalis and Schlegel, later Schelling, all of whom converted to Catholicism as a gesture of their fundamentalism) but to enrich it, by enclosing within its domain the whole of human experience. Indeed, the “impoverishment of Spirit” he laments in paragraph eight is not due to the loss but to the ethereal vacuity of a religion which he feels has never given sufficient attention to the importance of fellow-feeling and community, to concrete understanding instead of incomprehensible doctrines. (These were all criticisms Hegel had made of Christianity in his early essays of the 1790s.) Indeed, his way of introducing “Spirit” is already very modern; he writes: “the stage which self-conscious Spirit (*selbstbewusste Geist*) has presently reached” as if taking it for granted at the outset that “Spirit” is all of us rather than some divinity “above” or some “inner intangible soul” within. This is a radically new arrival in Western thinking. Indeed, the very idea of a “spirit of the times,” familiar as that may seem to us, was unknown before Hegel’s time. (John Stuart Mill, for example, comments on its novelty half a century later.) What Hegel is helping to do here, is to introduce the idea of World Spirit (*Weltgeist*, following Schelling and Hölderlin) as an all-embracing, secular, historical, concept-using entity, realizing itself through time and human events, and, especially, through the thinking of philosophers. It is Aristotle’s metaphysics “spiritualized” for the German, Christian, idealist philosophers of the 19th century.

In paragraph 10, Hegel tells us that “the power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition.” Thus this world-human-Spirit is essentially conceptual, articulate, and it is only through its expression of itself.¹³ Thus we are led to a series of *Bildung* metaphors throughout the Preface, all of which play with the apparent paradox that Spirit is not Spirit until it recognizes itself as such. But the idea is simple enough: history, for example, is not a sequence of events but an interpretation of events, so there is no history until there is an historian, an interpreter. But “the facts” are there, presumably, all along. Similarly, what we call “the human mind” is not just a sequence of collective experiences, but a hypostatization, a postulation—perhaps even an invention—of philosophers and psychologists, in order to distinguish experience from something else (e.g. the physical world), in order to distinguish human experience from the experience of God,

13. Thus Charles Taylor takes what he calls “expressivism” (the term comes from Isaiah Berlin) to be one of the two driving forces of Hegel’s philosophy; the other is the Enlightenment demand for autonomy. See his *Hegel*, ch. 1.

for example, or from unreflective worms and squirrels. Thus it is Kant who introduces the notion of "intellectual intuition" through which it is possible for God (not us) to know the world in itself or *noumenon*—a word he takes from the Greek *nous*. But it is also Kant who introduces "the transcendental ego" to refer to the conditional experiences of human consciousness, assuming, at the base of his theory, this this will be universal and necessarily the same for all of us. But the transcendental ego too exists only by virtue of its own self-recognition.¹⁴ The human mind exists, therefore, not just as the existence of collective human consciousness, but in its being *recognized* as such. It is not a thing in the world but an interpretation—or rather, it is a thing in the world by way of an interpretation. Thus Spirit too must be realized as such, *by us*; it becomes "actual" only in its recognition. (This is confused by Hegel's not infrequent and often ironic references to "God" in this paragraph and elsewhere.)

In paragraph 11, Hegel tells us that "Spirit has broken with" the old world and enters the new, "is . . . never at rest but always engaged in moving forward." Spirit "matures slowly and quietly into its new shape," destroying at the same time the old world. In paragraph 12, the new world becomes the newborn child, and Spirit becomes the Concept (*Begriff*). The metaphor switches again to the more Kantian image of a building and its foundation, and then back to the botanical metaphor of the tree;

When we wish to see an oak with its massive trunk and spreading branches and foliage, we are not content to be shown an acorn instead.

The point of all of these images is to stress the incompleteness of Spirit and the fact that Science, "the crown of a world of Spirit," is not completed at its beginnings either. And the point of the *Phenomenology*, of course, is to complete this process (or "approach" completion, in Hegel's more modest formulation in paragraph 5) by retracing the "various shapes and forms" in their "newly acquired meaning." What has happened to Spirit, he is telling us, is that, for the first time, it has had a look at itself, a "concept of the whole." And what remains is for a philosopher (guess who?) to make this recognition explicit.

In paragraph 13 (1/11/76/22), Hegel attacks the Romantics and intuitionists from another angle, the lack of general availability of their

14. "The possibility of the 'I think' must accompany all of my representations," is the recurrent theme of both editions of the first *Critique*. For Kant as for Descartes, consciousness is essentially self-consciousness. For Hegel, self-consciousness is an *achievement* for consciousness, not part of its essential structure. (The *potential* for self-consciousness is part of the essential structure, however, thus allowing two quite different retrospective readings of Kant's "*possibility* of the 'I think.'")

philosophy; "Science lacks universal intelligibility, and gives the appearance of being the esoteric possession of a few individuals." What Hegel is not saying, given his own style and sense of academic elitism, is that everyone ought to be able to read and easily comprehend this idea; what he is saying is that it must at least be written down and articulated in such a way that they could—if only with great effort and guidance—read and comprehend it. Thus Science is, at least in principle, "open and equally accessible to everyone." Hegel here refers to "the pure I" of understanding, and insists that one can "attain to rational knowledge by way of ordinary understanding." The distinction between reason (*Vernunft*) and understanding (*Verstand*) comes from Kant, and the "pure I" is his "transcendental ego."

An enormous amount of philosophical baggage is being slipped into the discussion here, but for the moment, we can restrict our comments to three simple points: (1) that there must be a bridge between ordinary concepts and principles and the "higher" knowledge that reason and philosophy aim to give us; and (2) that the "pure I" refers to "any rational consciousness whatever" (Kant's phrase) and thus undermines the claim of some philosophers to have special abilities to "see" (intuit) the Truth. (3) The distinction between reason and understanding is this: for Kant, the understanding applies concepts to sense to synthesize the objects of our experience. Reason is the manipulation of concepts independently of experience, and is therefore called "pure." Furthermore, Kant claims that the concepts of the understanding (that is, its basic or a priori "categories") are "fixed" and "rigid"; they do not vary and they do not change. For Hegel, however, the first part of this distinction seems absurd; all applications of concepts, in reason as well as in understanding (even in logic, he will add), presuppose applicability in experience; the difference between the two "faculties" of the human mind is that reason, unlike the fixed and rigid categories of the understanding, is "fluid"; its concepts change with the enlarging context. Understanding can deal only with everyday cognition, with what is "familiar" (*bekannte*). Reason is always looking for the bigger picture, ultimately the single all-encompassing vision. Reason is reflective and does not just apply concepts according to a priori schemata but examines its concepts as well, viewing them in a larger context and often changing them in the process. It is this examination of concepts, as well as the articulation of them, and the attempt to systematize their employment in an all-encompassing picture that distinguish "Science" (*Wissenschaft*) from the "unscientific consciousness" (*unwissenschaftlichen bewusstsehtens*).

One of Hegel's main concerns in the *Logic* (not in the *Phenomenol-*

ogy) is what Kant had called "the deduction of the categories." Aristotle had collected together a list of basic concepts or categories, but Kant complained that "he merely picked them up as they came his way."¹⁵ Kant did attempt a systematization of these categories according to the "table of judgments" which the logicians of his day had provided, but Reinhold, and then Fichte, and now Hegel, all complained that Kant too had failed to demonstrate this list of concepts to be complete and necessary. They each attempted to carry out such a systematization and demonstration. What concerns Hegel in the *Phenomenology* is a related enterprise—to see what different concepts or "forms of consciousness"—give rise to each other. But this is not, he insists, an activity of "understanding": to the contrary, it is a demonstration of the "fluidity" of reason and the way concepts are determined and transformed of their own accord through the philosophical examination of them.

The reference to "two sides" of a contemporary conflict (14/12f/77f/24f), in which the "sides" are both abused but neither is named, raises a controversy about whom it is Hegel has in mind. One side is reduced to silence by "the noisy bluster of the other," also because of its "weariness and indifference"; the other "boasts of a wealth of material and its intelligibility." Schelling was properly offended, for he and his disciples seemed to fit into the second "side." The first, presumably, would be the Romantics and intuitionist followers of Kant. The exact reference here is a matter of philosophical curiosity. What is revealing is the originality Hegel is claiming for his own work in "Science," contrary to his first disclaimer in the Preface, in comparison with his contemporaries.

SUBSTANCE AND SUBJECT

In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the true *das Wahre* not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*. (17/14/80/28)

This is perhaps the best-known single sentence in the Preface, and it is as close as we come in Hegel to a full-blown metaphysical position. What he has in mind, of course, is the whole history of physical realism (the world as physical "substance") and alternatively idealism (the world as ideas). Hegel, often identified as the ultimate idealist, says quite plainly that the world is both. The word "substance" here is

15. Kant, *CPR*, A 81, B 107.

misused; Descartes did not oppose substance to subject but insisted that the thinking subject was a substance (mental substance). Spinoza argued that there could be but one substance, but he also said that “thought” (and other mental activities) was one “attribute” of this one substance. Thus when Hegel clearly refers to Spinoza in the same paragraph, it embodies a sure misunderstanding; “If the conception of God as the one substance shocked the age in which it was proclaimed, the reason for this was on the one hand an instinctive awareness that, in this definition, self-consciousness was only submerged and not preserved.” It might be argued that the misunderstanding was that of “the age” rather than Hegel, but it is also clear that Hegel took great pains throughout his career to distinguish himself from Spinoza (who was a great favorite of both Schelling and Jacobi) and on much the same dubious grounds.

The insistence that we have to grasp truth “not only as substance but equally as subject” has a much more radical and anti-metaphysical meaning as well, however; what Hegel is saying here is that the Truth is not the way the world is “in itself” (or what Kant called “noumenon”) but the Truth is the way the world is *for us* (or what Kant called “phenomenon”). From the starting point of Hegel’s philosophy, the idea of the Truth as something beyond our experience is treated as a manifest absurdity.

The thesis that Truth is both substance and subject has a further significance, as a religious doctrine, a neo-pantheistic thesis that states that God is everything. But this is just the view that caused Spinoza (Fichte too) to be publicly condemned as a virtual atheist—so Hegel is protecting himself. He emphasizes the idea that God is self-conscious Spirit, and not just the physical universe. What he does *not* emphasize is the fact that God is also *no more than* self-conscious Spirit, that God is nothing more than our (collective) recognition of “Him” (i.e. of ourselves as Spirit).

The reference to Spinoza is followed by two more references, to “the opposite view, which clings to thought as thought, to universality as such,” and to “thought uniting itself to the being of substance, apprehending immediacy or intuition as thinking.” Identifications here vary (Baillie names Kant, Fichte, and Schelling; Kaufmann and Lasson suggest Kant and Schelling). I would suggest rather the whole sequence “Empiricism-Kant-Fichte” and then Jacobi and intuitionism as well as Schelling (the two “sides” from paragraphs 14–15).¹⁶

16. My reasons for thinking this are drawn from parallel contrasts in the *Logic* and the *Lectures*. See my “A Small Problem in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 13 no. 3, July, 1975.

Hegel now refers us to "the living substance" which is "in truth subject" (18/15/80/28) and adds, "or what is the same, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself." Here again is the developmental *Bildung* thesis, the emphasis on "movement" and self-realization ("positing itself"). The reader may have noticed by this time that Hegel plays fast and loose with such expressions as "or what is the same," and wherever he says this, it is a better than even bet that it is *not* the same, or at least, a radically different way of looking at a thesis. Special attention should also be drawn to the notion of "actual" (*wirklich*) which means "genuine" or fully developed rather than simply "real." Hegel introduces here another notion that will be with us throughout the book, the notion of "otherness" or what he here calls "*simple negativity*."¹⁷ The "living substance" (or Spirit) is "its self othering with itself." "It is the doubling which sets up opposition." And then it is "self-restoring sameness," "reflection of otherness within itself." The reader will probably recognize Fichte here, with his three-part (1) "positing" of self (through immediate intellectual intuition, like Descartes's *Cogito*), (2) of "not-self"—the Kantian constitution of the world of experience, *not* as the world of nature but as a moral stage, as "opposition"—and the final recognition (3) that the positing of the "not-self" is indeed part and parcel of the positing of self. It is a view that is not easy to state with intuitive plausibility, but it was accepted by Hegel, following Schelling, as a series of virtually unquestionable proposals. Except that, according to both Hegel and Schelling, Fichte had not succeeded in the third stage—self and not-self remained in perpetual opposition. But this basic image, of self "bifurcating itself" and setting up its own opposition, then recognizing that this opposition is indeed of its own making, is one of the basic "movements" of the *Phenomenology*. It is an abstract analog of a familiar experience; one creates a task for oneself (putting together a puzzle, for instance), perhaps in order to amuse oneself, then comes to view the task as wholly imposed, as an imposition, a burden. Only after a moment's reflection does one realize that it is a difficulty of one's own making.

Waxing Sartrean, we might say that "Spirit [man] makes itself," or, as Hegel says in paragraph 19, "the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Love with itself" (i.e. "Love playing with itself.") And Hegel adds, "but this idea sinks into mere edification and even insipidity" if it is not also seen as a serious struggle.

17. "Negativity" here means *distinct from*, and refers back to Kant's definition of the self (that is, the "transcendental ego") as that which is *other than* its indefinitely many objects.

It is here (18/15/81/30) that Hegel also gives us his first image of the circle,

It [Truth, Spirit] is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning . . .

It is a terrible metaphor; circles don't have ends and beginnings, and it is clear that what one has at the end of the Fichtean dialectic is *not* what one had at the beginning, except in the vague sense that they both refer to self. This is again to warn against Hegel's fast and loose play with "the same"; initial self-consciousness and the conception one has at the end of the process of self-realization are not the same. Hegel often claims an "identity" when in fact he is referring to a significant relation, but not identity at all.

This, perhaps, is the place to make note of Hegel's best-known distinction, between "in itself" and "for itself" (19/16/81/31). The distinction is well known, however, because of its importance in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy. Hegel's use of the terms is erratic, and it should be said that, later on, the usual dichotomy is not this but rather between "for itself" (for a form of consciousness) and "for us" (who can see beyond it). Here, as Kaufmann points out, "*an sich*" means "superficially." Elsewhere, it means "considered alone" or "potentially." "For itself" means, in general, "self-consciousness" (Sartre's usage too). Here it seems to mean more "for its own benefit." Since this is the first occurrence of the terms in this formal contrast, it is probably a good place for us to begin to be wary of them. (See the glossary, Appendix I.)

The true is the whole [*Das Wahre ist das Ganze.*]

This too is one of those catch-phrases of the Preface (20/16/81/32), but it is easily misunderstood. Taken alone, it conjures up images of Bradley and the idealist "coherence theory of truth" that so outraged Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore. But what Hegel has in mind is rather the ultimate synthesis insisted upon by the post-Kantian system builders, the need for philosophy to encompass the whole of human experience, without leaving anything out. (Thus Fichte left out the independent existence of nature, and Spinoza, on Hegel's view, or in any case d'Holbach and the hard-headed materialists, left out "spirit" and "consciousness.") And against the "coherence theory," Hegel adds: "But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development." This is not a mere coherence of propositions but a historical enterprise:

Of the Absolute, it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is.

The metaphor here is inconsistent (cf. paragraph 3, "the naked result is the corpse"). But in what follows Hegel makes clear that the end or result in fact includes everything that has come before it, in other words, the completed book, and not just its final chapter. "The true is the Whole" means the vast panorama of forms and concepts, including their various relationships and oppositions to each other. It does not mean (as in Bradley and Russell's version of Hegel) the "thin" totality of coherent propositions.¹⁸

If the element of Truth is the Concept (21/17/82/32), then it follows trivially that the truth, including the absolute truth, will be conceptualized, or "mediated" (*vermitteln*). Against those who would argue that knowledge of the Absolute must be "immediate" (e.g. Jacobi), Hegel insists that "mediation is nothing else than self-identity that moves itself; or it is reflection into itself, the moment of the ego which is for itself, pure negativity . . . simple becoming." What lies behind this is a radical thesis, anticipated by Kant and before him by Leibniz, which Hegel is advancing regarding the established philosophical concepts of "immediate" and "mediated."

Immediacy (*Unmittelbar*) and mediation (*Vermittlung*) traditionally turn on a special metaphor, the first meaning "direct" or "in touch with," the second meaning "at a distance removed from" or "through the medium of." In Descartes and the empiricists, for example, sensory impressions are "immediate" to the mind while the objects which cause those impressions are "mediated" through the senses, and through space as well. But mediation also includes the cognitive process of "working through" sense-experience with concepts. (This was as true for Descartes and empiricism as it was for Kant; it was just the nature of the "working through" that differed so radically.) It is the cognitive notion that Hegel employs, not the spatial metaphor, and his concern is with the need for all experience to be so "worked through" with concepts. We have seen that he follows Kant in insisting that all experience must be so "worked through" or conceptualized. But now, more radically than Kant, he insists that such "mediation" does not separate us from the Absolute (cf. Kant's metaphor of knowledge as

18. It is against this view, and their "logical atomist" alternative, that one should read Russell's comment that "Moore took the lead in the rebellion, and I followed with a sense of emancipation. . . . We believed that grass is green, that the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them. The world which had been thin and logical now became rich and varied" ("My Mental Development," in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Paul Schilpp (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1975).

a tool for grasping the Absolute, which distorts what it intends to know, which Hegel attacks in the Introduction). It is *through* conceptualization or mediation that we can reach the Absolute. Again, as always, the antagonist in these matters is Jacobi and the intuitionists. Mediation, Hegel insists, is nothing but self-comprehension, that is, understanding how we apply our concepts. Since the absolute Truth is total self-comprehension, it follows that mediation, when carried through completely, is the absolute Truth. This mediation, however, is not the employment of concepts by the understanding, which is "rigid" and so cannot develop itself, but by reason. Thus Hegel's abrupt transition from "mediation" to "reason"—"it is a misapprehension about reason when reflection is excluded from the true instead of being comprehended as a positive moment of the Absolute." It is reason's reflecting upon and thus conceptualizing ("mediating") our use of concepts in the understanding that gives us an adequate theory of truth.

Reason is *purposive activity* [*die Vernunft das zweckmassige Thun ist*]

If truth comes through mediation and mediation involves the development of concepts through reason, it is surely necessary to have some conception of the nature of reason (22/17/83/34). Given the *Bildung* metaphor we have constantly encountered, we cannot be surprised that reason is defined in terms of purposiveness. Nor can we be surprised that, given Hegel's Kantian conception of reason as a manipulator of concepts, reason becomes essentially an activity, a "doing." We have said all along that the Truth is developed in the system and that its medium is the Concept. Thus we may also say that what develops is reason, the activity of comprehending our own understanding, for the purpose of giving us total comprehension. It is important to return to our earlier discussion of Hegel's biological metaphor to insist once again that this purpose must be "internal" (Hegel here urges "the banishment of external purposiveness"). It is significant that Hegel, who has not yet mentioned any philosopher by name, now cites Aristotle explicitly, who "similarly defines nature as purposive activity." But, for Hegel, teleology is not a metaphysical principle. "This unrest is the self." It is *our reason* that is purposive. Again, Hegel is doing "phenomenology," not ancient metaphysics.¹⁹

In this paragraph (23/18/84/34), Hegel makes one of his most spectacular and most universally misunderstood claims, left dangling here but developed in the *Logic*. Hegel apparently attacks the grammatical

19. Cf. Rosen: "his procedure is not simply to move forward but to take a giant step backward to Greek philosophy" (*G.W.F. Hegel*, p. 23).

distinction between subject and predicate, maintaining that the subject of assertions such as "God is eternal" or "God is love" introduces "senseless sounds, a mere name; only the predicate says what it is and is its content and meaning." Hegel is *not* giving us a general claim about grammaticality, and this is not identical to his later claim concerning the *aufheben*'ing of the subject-object distinction. Hegel is raising a familiar ontological problem, which will be picked up again in chapters 1 and 2 (and with variations throughout the book). In ordinary language, predication assumes a subject whose reference is already agreed upon (e.g. "John," or "the dog who ate the hamburger" or "the red flower with the bee on it"). But in philosophy, reference to such particulars becomes a problem. When we start to analyze our identification of the subject, we find that we have already included a number of characteristics or properties by which we distinguish him, her, or it from other particulars. Thus the question comes up, what is left when one subtracts *all* such properties and is left with nothing but the subject itself? One answer is a "bare particular" or "substance" stripped of all attributes, and this is what the subject refers to. But, it can be argued (e.g. by Locke and the empiricists) that such a "bare particular" is nothing at all, and so what we refer to, in fact, is not the particular but the cluster of properties; but this means, in Hegel's terminology, that "the subject has disappeared into the predicates" (cf. 60/49/119/94). The upshot of the argument is, again in Hegel's words, that "the subject is not a fixed point to which the predicates are attached." Thus the distinction in ordinary grammar between subject and predicate becomes a problem on philosophical examination, and it is an open question, when we refer to anything, what we in fact are referring to and how we can refer at all. You can guess what rabbit Hegel is going to pull out of this ontological hat; whenever we refer, we are ultimately referring to Spirit. And when we refer to ourselves, in Descartes's innocent *Cogito* or the "absolute act of positing the self" in Fichte and Schelling, what we are really referring to is Spirit.

SYSTEM AND SCIENCE

... a so-called basic proposition or principle of philosophy, if true,
is also false ... (24/19/85/36)

In their insistence that Kant's philosophy be "systematized," the post-Kantians often made the additional demand that such a "system" con-

sist of a deduction of necessary principles from a single “first principle” or axiom. The model here is familiar to us in the history of philosophy, for example, the geometrical systems of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. One might argue that Kant does have such a system in his first *Critique*, with the “I think” as its premise, the “transcendental deduction of the categories” as its argument, and the principles of the Understanding as its theorems.²⁰ But the *Critique* was not fully or explicitly presented as such a system, and Karl Reinhold made a considerable reputation for himself by recasting Kant’s arguments in this manner. More famously, Fichte had attempted to systematize Kant in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, making the first principle, as in Descartes and Kant, the “positing of the ego” and then deducing various theorems, including the existence of the world (nature, the “non-ego”). Fichte introduced a peculiar twist to the concept of “deduction,” which remained constant throughout the period. For Fichte, the “necessity” of each “deduction” was not a matter of logical principle but a matter of teleology, a move “in order to” do something else. But Fichte fully accepted the idea that a philosophical system must “deduce” its conclusions from a first principle, and that first principle, like Descartes’s *Cogito* and Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception,” was the existence of one’s self.

What Hegel is arguing here thus goes against the whole history of modern philosophy, including his most immediate predecessors. But this is not just another reiteration of his view that “the truth lies in the whole.” It is also the argument, now commonplace, that any “first principle”—“self-evident” or not—*precedes* argument, and thus renders the whole system vulnerable to the rejection of the first principle. Hegel had seen this often enough in the history of philosophy; one philosopher begins with the claim, “there is only one substance” and another begins with “there are innumerable substances”—and there is no common ground for argument. What’s more, Hegel goes on to argue, every such principle will have its “defect,” if only being “one-sided.” And so, the system of the *Phenomenology* will not have a first principle; indeed, in a sense, it does not even have a beginning. We just begin. But what we begin with has no special status; in fact, it will be first to be *aufgehoben*.

And now, another summary (25/19/85/38):

That the True is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Spirit*—the most sublime concept and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion.

20. See Robert Paul Wolff, *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965).

This is the first we have been actually told that Spirit is the Absolute, but it has not been a secret. Hegel now goes on to tell us that “the spiritual alone is the actual; it is essence, or that which has *being in itself*.” (Notice that this phrase, here, means “totally independent.”) It also “relates itself to itself” (the Fichtean image of spirit dividing itself into an “opposition”) and it is “in and for itself” too, that is, it comes to realize (in Fichte’s third step) that it is everything, “*for itself*,” i.e. knowing itself as spirit. In this paragraph, Hegel now plays fast and loose with the concepts “in itself” and “for itself” (*an sich* and *für sich*) as well as “for us.” What he is saying however, is much simpler than his word-play would suggest. Spirit, before it comes to “realize itself” (in Hegel’s philosophy) does not yet see itself as Spirit, but *we* (reading Hegel) already know that it will do so. And human thought, summarized in the *Phenomenology*, is the vehicle in which it comes to do so (“the realm which it builds for itself in its own element”—i.e. “the pure Concept”).

We have thus far covered only 14 pages of the Preface, but we can see that it is already becoming highly repetitive. As we move on, the “growth” metaphors will keep coming (the “soil” image in paragraph 26), the importance of Science and the role of the Concept in Spirit’s self-realization will be stated upside-down and backwards, and the potential-actual Aristotelian metaphor of “in itself” and “for itself” will be used to pound us into submission. But at this point too, Hegel’s interest starts to shift toward the Logic he then intended to write, and the role of the *Phenomenology* as mere introduction becomes more in evidence (as explicitly stated in 35/28/96/58).

In paragraph 26 (20/87/40), we meet the *ladder* metaphor; “the individual has the right to demand that Science should at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint” and then, “should show him this standpoint within himself.” (An odd mixed metaphor; so why need a ladder?)²¹ In paragraph 28 (22F/89/44), Hegel tells us again that

The task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge had to be seen in its universal sense, just as it was the universal individual, self-conscious Spirit, whose formative education had to be studied.

But this time, the “education” (*Bildung*) is explicitly made out to be

21. Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, also provided us with a “ladder,” but he pulled it out from under us once we climbed it. Hegel, on the other hand, intends the ladder to be a fixture of our experience, so that we can climb up and down as we like, interweaving our new-found Science with our most everyday experiences (PG, 4).

one and the same for each individual and for Spirit (“the universal individual”). Not only is the single individual “incomplete Spirit, a concrete shape . . .” in which other individuals and the unity they share is only a “blurred outline.” Hegel also tells us that the path followed by every individual in his or her education is the same path already blocked out by Spirit itself (that is, by others before us), and the stages have been “made level with toil.” One can imagine, for example, how difficult life would be for each of us (assuming it would even be possible) if we had to invent a language, construct a social order and rules for cooperation anew, every generation. We revise and reform, to be sure, but the variations in language from generation to generation, for example, are but nuances upon nuances, a few new words, a few grammatical subtleties. What the conservatives see in horror as “the disintegration of the language” is in fact the most minimal change. We learn the language that is taught to us. We “discover” what has been “discovered” a million times before us. And each of us, in our abbreviated way, goes through the steps that, we may suppose, the speakers of language and the early speakers of English went through with great difficulty, over hundreds or thousands of years—and we learn it all in a few months. So it is with the forms of consciousness in general; the institutions of social responsibility, the rituals of obedience and courtesy, the practices that make up a culture—all of these we learn in months or years, but they were created, in more or less the same sequence, over several millennia. Thus Hegel tells us, “in a child’s progress in school, we shall recognize the history of the cultural development of the world.” But then, looking at this parallel from the other side (of Universal Spirit as substance), the education of each child and all of the children is nothing but “its [Spirit’s] acquisition of self-consciousness” culminating, of course, in the writing and reading of the *Phenomenology*.

“Science,” Hegel tells us again (29/24/90/46), is this formative process, and its goal is Spirit’s insight into itself. We would like to be told, of course, what this insight is, but this would be “the end without the means.” We each have to retrace all of these steps, and “linger over them,” appreciating each as “a complete individual form.” Anticipating his Philosophy of History, he tells us that, given the amount of trouble the World Spirit (*Weltgeist*) has gone through to provide us with the means, the least we could do is to look at them, get acquainted with them, which requires on our part, “a higher level of cultural reorientation.” (The notion of “higher” levels and such ascension imagery pervades these middle paragraphs.) Hegel is getting anxious to get us there.

HEGEL'S THEORY OF "PHILOSOPHICAL TRUTH"

If the Preface of the *Phenomenology* is a preliminary account of a theory of truth, what is that theory? So far, despite the twists and turns of Hegel's prose, we have not been told very much. In fact, boiled down to essentials, we have only been told that Truth, as the Absolute or Spirit, must be all-comprehensive, and is to be found in the history of collective human thought. The theory itself, however, is stated bluntly, if obscurely, in paragraph 37, when

... Spirit has made its existence identical with its essence, it has itself for its object just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowing and truth, is overcome. Being is then absolutely mediated; it is a substantial content which is just as immediately the property of the 'I,' it is self-like or the Concept.

Hegel's theory, anticipated here, is this: Truth is not correspondence of "being" and "knowing." Truth is the conceptual activity through which we conceive the world together with our recognition that these concepts determine the world ("Being is absolutely mediated"). There is no Reality "in itself" beyond our experience ("existence identical with its essence"). Truth is experience ("the property of the 'I'") conceived through, and nothing other than, "the Concept" (the conceptual constitution of the way things "really" are). *Truth is nothing other than the self-satisfaction of those basic concepts with which we think and experience the world and which themselves make up the structure of the world.*

With this, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is concluded. What Spirit prepares for itself in it, is the element of [true] knowing. In this element the moments of Spirit now spread themselves out in that *form of simplicity* which knows its object as its own self. They no longer fall apart into the antithesis of being and knowing, but remain in the simple oneness of knowing; they are the True in the form of the True, and their difference is only the difference of content. Their movement, which organizes itself in this element into a whole, is *Logic or speculative philosophy*.

Here Hegel is telling us not only that the *Phenomenology* is a mere preliminary to the system proper, but that the *Phenomenology* is not "Science" at all; it is only "the system of the experience of Spirit," "the *appearance* of Spirit" and so something "false." In other words, the entire *Phenomenology* is a study of the "false" (i.e. incomplete) forms of consciousness, the *Logic* the "true" ones ("the True in its *true shape*"). But then Hegel assures us, again (cf. paragraph 2) that the "false" has its proper place in philosophy too, since it is by way of the "false" that

we arrive at the “true.” It is because of the often simple-minded claims of earlier philosophers that we now have a sense of the Truth at all.

At this point, Hegel gives us two alternative paradigms to his “absolute” view of Truth as the satisfaction of our own concepts and criteria, “Spirit knowing itself” or “the self-realization of the Concept”: in modern terms, we recognize them as the “correspondence theory of truth” and the “coherence theory of truth,” which take as their paradigms historical factual knowledge and mathematical theorems respectively.

Regarding historical truths, we are tempted to think that a claim such as “Caesar was born in 102 B.C.” would be made true by a fact, namely, *the fact that* Caesar was born in 102 B.C. The truth of the claim supposedly consists in its “correspondence” with that fact. But, Hegel argues (40/32/100/62), any knowledge of such a fact, to be of value, “must be supported by reasons.” The argument is clearly insufficient, since a correspondence theorist would rightly protest that, although the *justification* of our claim to knowledge might require such reasons, the *truth* of the claim would not. To give the argument its force, one must add Hegel’s view that there is no valid distinction between justification and truth, that our *way* of knowing is what makes it true. This is *not* to deny that in some sense, a historical claim is made true by “a fact,” or that there may be historical truths which we do not and may never know. But it must be clear that such factual truth cannot be the paradigm or model for a philosophical theory of truth. A philosophical theory is not particularly concerned with facts but rather with general comprehension. It is not a question of correspondence but rather of the best overall interpretation.

A more persuasive paradigm for philosophy has been mathematics, the lure of Euclidean certainty and Newtonian elegance that had seduced Descartes and so many rationalists. Yet Hegel points out that there are glaring dis-analogies between the truth of a mathematical theorem and the truth of a philosophical theory. (He does not consider the more enticing analogy, between a mathematical *theory* and a philosophical theory.) A mathematical theorem is true whatever its proof, “its proof is external to its truth.”²² A philosophical theory, however, requires its development as *part* of its truth. Moreover, mathematical knowledge is “defective” because of its “poverty of purpose” and “the defectiveness of its material,” that is, it has nothing to do with comprehension of ourselves or with the development of the Concept or Truth (in modern terms, mathematics is not yet meta-

22. Perhaps it should be pointed out here that Hegel was a modestly accomplished mathematician; the calculus was one of the subjects he taught both at Jena and in the Gymnasium at Nürnberg.

mathematics). Again, the arguments are not convincing, and one must presuppose much of Hegel's later theory in order even to make sense of them. But the upshot of the contrast between Hegel's theory and historical and mathematical truth is clear: an adequate and totally comprehensive theory of truth can take neither matters of fact nor purely formal truths as its paradigm. Truth is not merely "correspondence with the facts" nor is it "provability within a system."

Here (47/36f/105/70) Hegel gives us the least helpful but the most dramatic characterization of "philosophical truth":

The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose.²³

The "members" of the revelry are the individual forms of Spirit, "moments of the Concept" whose "appearance is the actuality and the movement of truth." The revelry or "giddiness" refers, as Kaufmann argues, to the fact that each form "is unbalanced and a little ridiculous," but they appear together, in "tranquil repose." Schacht describes the "whirl" a bit differently: it is the function of the evanescent appearance and disappearance of conscious events while the "transparent and simple repose" is due to "the substance, the *Begriff*, which is timeless and unchanging."²⁴ But here the difference in interpretation becomes all-important, for it is an open question whether the Concept is in any sense "timeless and unchanging," and whether it even makes sense to describe an orgy as a "tranquil repose." In the *Logic*, perhaps (e.g. p. 58f.) the various forms may commune together peaceably, but in the *Phenomenology* we have instead "living substances," all roaring drunk, competing with one another if also holding each other up. And if indeed each collapses as it leaves the revelry, the "tranquil repose" may be nothing other than the fact that, at the end of the book, the party is over. *In vino veritas*, after all.

HEGEL'S METHOD: "DIALECTIC"

It is not until very late in the Preface (48/37/106/72), that Hegel finally begins to broach the topic of "method":

It might seem necessary at the outset to say more about the *method* of this movement, i.e., of Science. But its Concept is already to be found in what has been said, and its proper exposition belongs to

23. "*der bacchantische Taumel*" "*Taumel*" is literally "giddiness"; cf. Baillie- "revel," Kaufmann- "whirl," Findlay- "riot." Truth as drunken orgy; what a welcome relief from J.L. Austin: "*in vino*, perhaps, *veritas*, but in a sober symposium, *verum*."

24. Schacht, p. 19.

Logic, or rather it is Logic. For the method is nothing but the structure set forth in its pure essentiality. We should realize, however, that the system of ideas concerning philosophical method is yet another set of current beliefs that belongs to a bygone culture.²⁵

In other words Hegel rejects the idea of a "method" in philosophy. (See Chapter 6, on the Introduction.) What he has in mind in particular is the "*old fashioned*" idea that philosophical science should be as precise as mathematics, as in Descartes's deductive model and the many such models developed ever since. But he also includes any "method" which includes "asserting propositions, adducing reasons for it and refuting its opponents." Methods are "external," Hegel tells us, whereas "Truth (*die Wahrheit*) is its own self-movement." The *Phenomenology* does not have a "method," therefore, but rather we (the philosophers reading Hegel) will follow the Concept as it transforms itself.

This finally leads, at long last, to what everyone knows as "the dialectic" (50/38/107/74):

... the *triadic form*²⁶ must not be regarded as scientific when it is reduced to a lifeless schema, a mere shadow, and when scientific organization is degraded into a table of terms. Kant rediscovered this triadic form by instinct, but in his work it was still lifeless and uncomprehended. Since then it has, however, been raised to its absolute significance. . . so that the Concept of Science has emerged.

The rare and welcome reference to a proper name must be noted. The following discussion alludes unquestionably to Schelling, culminating in an attack on Schelling's "schematizing formalism" and "monochromatic character" (51–52). In case there was any doubt at the beginning of the Preface whether Schelling was the butt of Hegel's attack, the very explicit references to the details of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in paragraph 50 should settle that.

Having thus accused Kant and Schelling (Fichte too)²⁷ of having deprived this "excellent" idea of life and Spirit, "flayed . . . its skin wrapped around lifeless knowledge" (52), Hegel proceeds to outline his dialectic. "Science dares only organize itself by the life of the Concept itself," in other words, by watching the associations and require-

25. "Concept" ("*Begriff*") here refers to a particular conception of method. "The Concept" takes on an entire spectrum of meanings in Hegel, from particular concepts and conceptions to an abbreviation for the holistic conception of his entire philosophy. "Culture" in the above quotation is "*Bildung*."

26. The "triadic form" is the famous "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" from Kant and Fichte. It is noteworthy both that (1) Hegel assumes that it is so familiar to his readers that he need not spell it out explicitly and (2) he does not bother to use this form himself, either in his discussion in the Preface or in the text of the book.

27. Cf. Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 50n.

ments of the various forms of consciousness, according to their own inner "logic." The Understanding, he tells us, is just a "pigeon-holing process," but scientific cognition-reason- "demands surrender to the life of the object, or what is the same thing [N.B.] confronting and expressing its inner necessity" (53).

We now, finally (54/43/111/82), reach a discussion of idealism as such, but first of all Hegel takes another swipe at his colleagues for their "superficial" (*begrifflos*) talk about "the identity of Thought and Being." Against Fichte, he says that "Science is not that idealism which replaced the dogmatism of assertion with a dogmatism of assurance, or a dogmatism of self-certainty." Fichte, remember, divided all philosophy into two camps, "dogmatism" (which might more neutrally be called "realism") and "idealism"—which he vastly preferred. Hegel's accusing him of "dogmatism" here (albeit the "dogmatism of self-certainty") is a calculated insult. What Hegel suggests instead is that, by using "cunning," namely, by pretending to "abstain from activity" but in fact looking on and watching, we can see how the content of consciousness and its various forms transform themselves (54).

This image of consciousness in self-transformation is the key to the *Phenomenology* and its "dialectical" method. Notice that it is not we (reading the *Phenomenology*) who are doing the transforming, nor is it Hegel. The forms of consciousness change themselves, through history, obviously, but, much more importantly, through their own logical interplay which Hegel calls their "logical necessity" (56). He tells us that the study of Science is to take on for oneself "the strenuous effort of the Concept" (*Anstrengung des Begriffs*) (57); that is, we must *think ourselves through* the whole sequence of concepts and forms (instead of wasting our time reading the Preface, perhaps). We have already given an example of how such self-transformation works, in the sequence of philosophies that make up British Empiricism; it was not just the particular philosophers (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) but the logic of the ideas themselves that rendered necessary the sequence. And the student of philosophy comes to understand that sequence, not just by reading the philosophers but by thinking oneself through the same sequence of ideas.

On Anaxagoras (55/44/114/85), cf. Hegel in the *Science of Logic* (Introduction):

Anaxagoras is praised as the man who first gave voice to the idea that we ought to lay down, as the world-principle, *Nous*, that is thought, and thought as the world-essence. He thus laid the foundation of an intellectualist view of the universe, and of this view logic must be the pure form. In it we are not concerned with thinking *about* something

lying outside thought, as the basis of thought, nor with forms which serve merely as *signs* of truth; on the contrary, the necessary forms and characteristic determinations of thought are the content and the supreme truth itself.

Hegel has several times now used the term “speculative” (59/47/117/88)—as a way of thinking, as a kind of philosophy. It was a term he used at some length in his early *Differenz*-essay on Fichte and Schelling, but it plays virtually no role in the text of the *Phenomenology*. It is rather a reference to the standpoint of the *Logic*, and it means: thinking in terms of the whole, in terms of synthesis, not analysis. Hegel's biographers are fond of saying that he preferred “dialectical” and “speculative thinking” by temperament. This is, perhaps, an important point; some philosophers, Hume for instance, tend to approach problems analytically, asking such questions as “How does it work?” “What are its components?” and “How can we prove (or disprove) this?” Schelling and Hegel, on the other hand, tend to be holistic and thereby synthetic, asking instead such questions as “How do these things tie together?” and “How does this fit into the larger picture?” In the *Phenomenology* this difference is not explained very well; in the *Logic*, Hegel distinguishes between analytic, dialectical, and speculative thinking.²⁸ Analytic thinking is the exclusive use of the limited concepts of understanding. Dialectic, he tells us, is “the supersession of finite characters” (that is, the concepts of the understanding) which pass into their opposites—as in Kant's antinomies. In the employment of the understanding, these antinomies will be nothing but contradictions (as Kant concluded). But in the service of speculative reasoning, dialectic can be recognized “in a true light” as “the internal tendency of one-sidedness . . . of the understanding.”²⁹ In general, Hegel says, dialectic is nothing but life, movement of any kind, any development in several stages. But speculation is something more than this; it is “positive reason”³⁰ and “absolute self-comprehension”³¹; it “apprehends the unity of propositions in their opposition.”³² In other words, while dialectic displays the movement of concepts, speculative thinking sees their unity. In the *Phenomenology*, this distinction is not made so clearly. In the *Logic*, Hegel tells us that speculation is very much like “what used to be called Mysticism,” except that mysticism is “the negative product of the understanding”

28. Trans. W. Wallace *The Logic of Hegel (Logic)*, p. 79f.

29. *Logic*, p. 81.

30. Ibid. 82.

31. Ibid. 153.

32. Ibid. 82.

while speculative Truth is "positive."³³ The speculation of the *Phenomenology*, however, is confined to the short final chapter; the rest is all dialectic.

One problem that exercises Hegel considerably is the form that a sentence could possibly have if it is to describe—as one must if it is to be "speculative"—the whole of things. This is the problem of the *Logic* rather than the *Phenomenology*, but it might be worth mentioning, since Hegel hints at it here (58–68 as well as 23). Simply stated, the problem is that, if *everything* is the subject, what else could there be to say about it, to apply as predicate? Thus thinking, Hegel tells us, "loses its firm objective basis" (62). But rather than clarify, much less give examples of what "speculative thinking" and "the Concept" should look like, he again begins taking swipes at his competitors and distinguishes true "speculative thinking" from merely "argumentative" reasoning which just wants to refute everyone else's positions without offering an alternative of its own, and "ratiocinative" thinking which resembles speculation but instead just assumes the Absolute to begin with and then plays around with various contents (Schelling, of course); he distinguishes it too from merely formal thinking that involves concepts without any content at all, and from "picture-thinking" which confuses metaphors for concepts, images for truth. What we do not get, much to our annoyance, is the one thing that would help us read the *Phenomenology*—an account of the "Concept" as it relates to the different "forms" or "shapes" (*Gestalten*) of that book and a clear sense of what the "dialectic," as opposed to the final act of "speculative" recognition, is doing.

The word "dialectic" does not appear until paragraph 65 (51/123/98), and then only in a series of short bursts ("dialectical movement" and "dialectical form" in 66). Notice that "dialectic" is *not* a method or a kind of "proof" in the usual sense. It is not a way of establishing the truth so much as it is the truth. Growth is not the acorn's method of finding an oak tree.

The "parts" or "elements" of the dialectic are propositions (*Sätze*). Thus the dialectic is intimately bound up with concepts and with *language* (66/51/123/98). This is not to say that *Sätze* are sentences of any particular language, nor are they the abstract entities that some recent philosophers (e.g. G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Alonzo Church) have made them out to be. A *Satz* is more like an assertion or statement, but with the stipulation that it need not be publicly made and

33. Ibid. 154.

need not be held by any particular person.³⁴ The proposition itself is an “empty form,” that is, an abstract characterization. As a “thought determination,” it is an “intellectual abbreviation” of a form of consciousness. The *Phenomenology* is a dialectic of propositions which constitute as well as describe forms of consciousness. But it is not a substitution for experience, much less experience itself. The *Phenomenology*, like Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, is a book to be read by those who have already had the requisite experience.

In what follows (67/124/102/53), Hegel presents an ironic but very readable essay on the substitution of common sense for serious philosophy, as if philosophy is something everyone can do (Hegel says, we don’t believe that anyone who has eyes and fingers can make shoes, so why does everyone think he’s a philosopher?). Or else, it is supposed that philosophy is “merely formal knowledge devoid of content.” But for Hegel, philosophy is the basis of all knowledge, as necessary to every Science as it is to “life, Spirit, and truth.” He argues once again that philosophical Science and “common sense,” initially thought to be opposed to each other, are really related as the fully matured and actual to the implicit and the merely potential. And again, against common-sense philosophy and intuitionism and “those who read reviews of philosophical essays, at most prefaces and first paragraphs,” he repeats that “true thoughts and scientific insight are only to be won through the labor of the Concept” (70). At this point Hegel actually compares himself with Plato and Aristotle (in case we haven’t yet appreciated the importance of all of this) and contrasts his views with “current ideas about truth.” He prepares himself to be ill-received by a public that is “not ready to receive” the Truth, but he saves his special scorn for those who, unlike the general public, will blame the author rather than themselves for their difficulty in understanding it (71). It is with some relief that we turn to the last page of the Preface where, finally, Hegel gives us in a single short paragraph what the Preface itself, and ultimately the whole of the text, is all about—the

34. The distinction presupposed here is now commonly made by philosophers of language, between the language itself (or what Saussure called “*langue*”) and the language *spoken* (Saussure’s “*parole*”). Logicians often distinguish between the *proposition*, which is the bearer of truth and falsity, the *sentence*, which is the basic unit of the language, and the *statement*, which requires a speaker using a sentence to assert a proposition. A statement is made by a particular person at a particular time; propositions and sentences are not localizable in this sense and so can be said to be impersonal (or, sometimes, “eternal”). It is this that Hegel has in mind when he insists that “the Concept” is “eternal,” which no more carries with it the bliss of eschatological theology than W.V.O. Quine’s routinely secular conception of an “eternal sentence,” that is, a sentence so modified that it remains true in every context of utterance. (Hegel invokes the same notion in the chapter on “Sense-Certainty,” where he toys with the idea of translating the context-bound statement “It is now night-time” into an eternal sentence.)

emergence of a sense of universal Spirit and the consequent *unimportance* of the individual:

For the rest, at a time when the universality of Spirit has gathered such strength, and the singular detail, as is fitting, has become correspondingly less important, when too, that universal aspect claims and holds on to the whole range of the wealth it has developed, the share in the total work of the Spirit which falls to the individual can only be very small. Because of this, the individual must all the more forget himself, as the nature of Science implies and requires. Of course, he must make of himself and achieve what he can; but less must be demanded of him, just as he in turn can expect less of himself, and may demand less for himself. (*Phenomenology*, 72)

For the reader who is accustomed to finding in prefaces a few sarcastic remarks and sentimental expressions of gratitude to the author's colleagues, publisher, husband wife, mother, or typist, the foregoing must have been exhausting. Accordingly, one might be well advised to consider a brief dialectical respite before getting down to "the subject matter itself," namely, the *Phenomenology*.

Appendix to Part I: A Glossary of Terms, Translated into Ordinary English

Because Hegel sought to overcome—without in any way being a purist—the alienated academic language of philosophy, because he injected into the foreign terms and artificial expressions of that language the concepts of ordinary thinking, he succeeded in introducing the speculative spirit of his native language into the speculative movement of philosophizing. —Hans Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik*

The problem with Hegel's terminology is not so much an excessive use of jargon as such, but his free and rather careless use of everyday terms in a variety of contexts, a source of annoying obscurity only vaguely excused by the theory of "speculative" language and "the fluidity of the Concept." Terms are used inconsistently; they are played off against one another and punned upon. Casual colloquialisms are drafted to do the job of concepts that ought to be well-defined and, worst of all, Hegel seems to think that the less explicit a term, the greater the scope of its meaning. In what follows I have tried to give a fair account of the way Hegel uses some of his most commonly recurring terms, particularly in the Preface and Introduction of the *Phenomenology*, since the terms throughout the rest of the text tend to

be variations on these. All terms should always be interpreted in context, however, because of their ambiguity and “fluidity.” (Cross-referenced terms in the glossary appear in small capital letters.)

ABSOLUTE (*das Absolute*): complete, self-contained, all-encompassing. “The Absolute” is the unified, comprehensible whole—in plain terms, knowable reality. When Hegel talks about “knowing the Absolute” he means, knowing reality (as opposed to just knowing our own perceptions and ideas). When he talks about “absolute knowledge” he means knowledge that is unbiased, undistorted, unqualified, all-encompassing, free from counter-examples and internal inconsistencies. Opposed to: relative, qualified, **CONDITIONED**, **ABSTRACT**, partial. “Absolute knowing” does *not* mean knowing every detail about everything. It means having an adequate *conception* of knowledge and the Absolute, and understanding that there is no separation or “epistemological gap” between them.

ABSTRACT (*abstrakt*): one-sided, partial, empty, devoid of content. To abstract is to pick out some aspects of a thing to the exclusion of others, or to make a general claim without fleshing out its details and its context. (For example, a freshman philosopher throws off the comment that “it’s all subjective,” or a television guru declares that “All is One.”). Opposed to: **CONCRETE**. An “abstract universal” is an inadequate or ungrounded conception, or a half-truth. “Abstract” does *not* mean “theoretical” or “abstruse.”

ACTIVITY (*Thun*): “doing,” an irregular, very general concept. Opposed to: passivity, mere thinghood. The picture Hegel gives of consciousness, reason, and reality, which he gets from Leibniz, Kant, and Fichte, is that of an active grasping (*auffassen* or *aufzufassen*), determination of the world of experience through the application of concepts. It is opposed to the passive-receptive model of empiricism and intuitionism. “Activity” is to be construed in the general sense, not necessarily a full-blooded action or even as an activity in the usual sense. Cf. the later epistemological concept of “act” in European epistemology. In the *Phenomenology*: “Reason is purposive activity” (*Phenomenology*, 22). Reality, too, is activity (of Spirit).

ACTUAL, ACTUALITY (*wirklich, Wirklichkeit*): fully developed, matured, in the case of Spirit or Truth, explicit, “for-itself.” Opposed to: potentiality, possible but not yet developed. “Only the spiritual is actual” means that only a spiritual conception of ourselves is fully developed and fully adequate: it does *not* mean that only the spiritual is real, that is, only it exists. (Cf. in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: “The *actual* is the rational; the rational is the *actual*,” which means that

what is fully developed according to its own internal principles is rational, and vice versa. It is virtually a tautology. It is *not* the horrendous political statement that what is real, that is, whatever is the case, is rational and therefore right.)

[AUFHEBEN]: This is one of the few German terms that is well-enough known to English readers to deserve its own entry. It is usually translated by Miller as “supersede,” by Baillie as “sublate,” by Kaufmann as “sublimate.” In ordinary German it means “to pick something up”; in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* it means to *move on*, but keeping or conserving what has come before it. Thus, according to Hegel, Hume’s philosophy is an ‘*aufhebung*’ of Locke’s empiricism, because it retains its essential principles but moves on to work out the consequences and implications in a very different form than one finds in Locke. A foreign agent may be a violent homeopath who has “*aufgehoben*” his infantile aggression in the more respectable outlet of “duty to country,” and a philosopher may take up a common-sensical idea and, saving its central insights, render it *aufgehoben* as a sophisticated philosophical theory. But in addition to the moving on and preserving the essential content, “*aufheben*” also has the implication of an *improvement*, an elevation of the original into something better. The transitions of the *Phenomenology* are all supposed to *aufheben* the ones before them.

[BILDUNG]: see DEVELOPMENT

CERTAINTY (*Gewissheit*): unquestioning, naïve, unreflective, taken as simply obvious, given. Usually paired with IMMEDIATE. Opposed to: UNCERTAINTY. The first attitude in each phase of the dialectic, e.g. “Sense-Certainty,” “Self-Certainty,” “Reason’s Certainty.” *Not*: known beyond a doubt (for good reasons). It is an attitude of the knower, not the degree of warrant for the known. But “certainty” can also refer to the *object* of unreflective assurance, as in “that’s a certainty.”

COMPREHENSION (*begreifen*; *aufzufassen*): more than just knowing: “grasping” and “taking hold of”; cognitive control. Ultimately, all comprehension, unlike “understanding,” is *self*-comprehension, self-consciousness, reflective knowing. *Begreifen* is linked to the Concept (*Begriff*) and is involved in absolute knowing; *aufzufassen* is more like “apprehending” or recognizing in an unreflective way. Comprehension includes the ability to explain, to articulate, to justify. Opposed to: naïveté, indifference.

CONCEPT (*Begriff*): the tool of both understanding and reason. For Kant, a concept is a “rule” for interpreting experience. When Hegel talks of “*the* Concept” he sometimes just means “concepts” (in gen-

eral). In the *Phenomenology* he often means the most adequate conception of the world as a whole. But this also includes the most adequate conception of the concepts we use in comprehending the world, and so one might say that “the Concept” is the correct conception about the role of Concepts in the world. Hegel would reject Kant’s distinction between a priori and empirical concepts on the grounds that *no* concepts are necessary outside of some particular context, although he would also hold that certain concepts can be necessary to and “constitutive” of a particular form of consciousness. For example, the concept of “cause” is necessary to and part of the conceptual structure of Newtonian mechanics, but it is in no sense a priori for knowledge in general. Because Hegel thinks that the most adequate conception of something is always the conception of it as a whole, he often uses “the Concept” simply to refer to the conception of a thing in its entirety (for example, he talks about “the Concept of an animal” as a living creature, rather than as a body of parts, as an anatomist might view it.) And since Hegel is so concerned with the way concepts change, he also uses “the Concept” to refer to the *process* of conceptual development. These very different meanings are usually evident in context. Opposed to: INTUITION (*Anschauung*) or inarticulate apprehension; it is often juxtaposed with OBJECT in the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology*, and it is sometimes contrasted with image (*Vorstellung*), translated by Miller as “picture-thinking.” N.B. “*Der Begriff*” is generally translated by Miller, and erratically by Baillie, as “Notion.” I have used “concept” everywhere in my discussions, including my quotations from the Miller translation of the text.

CONCRETE (*konkret*; also *wirklich*): the whole, the thing-itself. Opposed to: ABSTRACT. Does *not* mean “particular” or “solid,” except in the sense of “in its entirety.” The sidewalk in front of the library is made of concrete, but it is not *konkret*.

CONDITIONED (*bedingt*): limited, finite, contextually dependent. “Conditioned universal” (*Unbedingtallgemeinen*) = property (*Eigenschaft*), e.g. redness, sweetness.

CONSCIOUSNESS (*bewusstsein*): knowing something; conscious *of*. . . . Consciousness is not particularly “psychical” (Baillie sometimes slips in such notions), it does not mean self-enclosed “mind.” Like contemporary phenomenologists, Hegel insists that consciousness *includes* its “object.” Most generally, it means having experience; more specifically (in the first Part of the *Phenomenology*), knowing something. Consciousness should not be thought of, for Hegel, as “the mental realm” which lends itself to quasi-spatial and dualistic Cartesian metaphors.

Following Kant, Hegel sees consciousness primarily as an *activity*. Furthermore, consciousness does *not* refer to a particular person's awareness or knowing, but only knowing in general; e.g. "It is known that life on earth originated at least 3.5 billion years ago." The question that follows is not "By whom?" but "Known how?—On what grounds?" Since consciousness ultimately recognizes itself as Spirit, that is, as everything, "consciousness" is not actually opposed to anything else; in fact, it is Hegel's whole aim to show that there is nothing "outside" of or opposed to consciousness. Ultimately, therefore, it becomes a vacuous term, without employment. However, at various stages in the *Phenomenology*, consciousness does set itself off against something else, its "object," or what it is conscious *of*. In the first part of the *Phenomenology*, for example, consciousness is opposed to objects which are "given" to it as "immediate." In the first half of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness (which takes its 'object' to be something other than itself) is contrasted with *self-consciousness*, which takes itself as its object. But, by the end of the book, Hegel makes it clear that consciousness is not actually opposed to anything, or, paraphrasing Fichte, there is nothing in or for consciousness that consciousness has not, in some sense, put there itself.

DETERMINE, DETERMINATE (*bestimmen, bestimmt*): conceptualize/-d, articulate/articulatable, pickout/identifiable, particularize/particular, specify/specific. "Determine" plays a similar role in Hegel's epistemology to Kant's "constitute," Fichte's "posit"; it means "to give form to." A determinate object has a form. "Thought-determination" (24, 91, 46) - (*Gedankenbestimmung*): giving form to experience through thought. Opposed to: indeterminate, formless.

DEVELOP/DEVELOPMENT (*bilden, Bildung*): to take form, to grow. To develop onself (*sich bilden*) - educate. The "root metaphor" of the entire *PG*—growth and education. Hegel several times uses the image of a growing tree or a growing child to illustrate his model of philosophy, but perhaps the dominant philosophical image is Plato's metaphor of education, in which the philosopher leads the uneducated out of the shadows and into the light of Truth.

DIALECTIC, DIALECTICAL MOVEMENT (*Dialektik, dialektische Bewegung*): a conversation back and forth: development through various and apparently opposed or contradictory stages. The term occurs surprisingly rarely in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel does not consider himself a "dialectician," but rather a "speculative philosopher." The dialectic for him is not a method to get at the Truth, but rather it is the Truth, that is, the activity of philosophical thinking itself. He-

gel says throughout the Preface that the Truth is “the whole,” “the process as well as the result.” The dialectic is that process. In the *Logic*, dialectic is contrasted with reflection, speculation, and philosophical development, but in the *Phenomenology*, these are roughly equivalent. The “elements” of the dialectic are “propositions” (*Sätze*), and therefore tied to concepts and to language. The dialectic is the process of development of an adequate conception of the world, by way of pushing a wide variety of conceptions to their ultimate conclusions.

ESSENCE (*Wesen*): what a thing really is, the thing-in-itself, its conceptual core. Opposed to: accident, ill-formed or undeveloped. The concept of “essence” is not well developed in the *Phenomenology*: it is extensively discussed in the *Logic* (where it is defined as “being-for-itself,” “the show of the Concept”). In the *Phenomenology*, an essence often refers to a fully developed being, an ideal example.

EXPERIENCE (*Erfahrung*): consciousness of an object. *Not*: sensation, “raw experience,” “sense-data,” or intuition. Experience *includes* its objects (“What an experience I had last night!”) Experience necessarily involves conceptualization. It is a general conception, not limited to knowledge (as in Kant), but one which includes practical, religious, aesthetic, and moral experience. Hegel would agree with Kant that “all knowledge begins with experience,” but he gives “experience” a broader and less technical interpretation than Kant. For one thing, he includes the process of reflection on and understanding experience as an essential part of experience, and he also has built into his conception of experience the notion of a *process* rather than momentary consciousness of something. The original title of the *Phenomenology* was *The Science of the Experience of Consciousness*.

EXTERNAL PRINCIPLE: not in the subject itself. For example, doing philosophy to make money instead of being motivated by the intrinsic fascination with the ideas. Opposed to: **INTERNAL PRINCIPLE**.

FLUID (*flüssige*): flexible, not rigid or fixed. A common image Hegel uses to contrast reason with the understanding and the Concept with Kant’s fixed categories. What he means is that reflecting on the concepts one is using, evaluating them, etc., leads to change of those concepts. It is the difference, to use the Wittgensteinian metaphor, between simply playing a game, leaving the rules unquestioned, and examining the game itself, in which case we might well change the rules. The “game” in this case is knowledge itself. Opposed to: fixed, rigid, dogmatic.

FOR ITSELF (*für sich*): reflective, by itself, explicit, self-comprehending, fully developed. These meanings do not coalesce, and this

is one of the problems with this key term (and its complement, "in itself" (*an sich*)). Truth is "for itself" when it comprehends itself. A human being is "for oneself" when he or she is independent and self-reflective, but also, withdrawn, cut off. Opposed to: "for us," usually. It is not generally contrasted with "in itself," except when the contrast is potential ("in itself") versus actual (developed "for itself").

FOR US (*für uns*): an often used phrase, Hegel's way of indicating that the narrator of the text is not the consciousness being examined in the text. It is also a device Hegel uses to prevent us from ever slipping into Kant's conception of the thing or the world "in itself." Things and the world are *always* "for us," that is, in Kant's terms, "phenomenal." In the early parts of the *Phenomenology*, this "for us" keeps us at a distance from the subject matter: at the end of the book, the "for us" is identical to Spirit "in and for itself." Usually opposed to: FOR ITSELF.

FORMALISM (*Formalismus*): a reference to Schelling, who started with an abstract form and applied it "to whatever happened his way." Opposed to: DIALECTIC and DEVELOPMENT.

FORM OF CONSCIOUSNESS (*Gestalt des Bewusstseins*): a self-sufficient and independent conceptual framework, a stage in spiritual development; a chapter in the *Phenomenology*. Roughly, a "form of life," a conceptual life-style. N.B. Miller variously translates "Gestalt" as "shapes" and "patterns" as well as "forms," causing some confusion in the text.

[GEIST]: see SPIRIT

IDEA (*Idee*; *Gedanke*): the Absolute of the *Logic*, which "goes forth as Nature, Spirit and Logic." In the *Phenomenology* the Absolute Truth. But *Idee* is not an essential concept as such in the *Phenomenology*, and *Gedanke* is more often translated as "thought" (see THOUGHT).

IMMEDIATE (*unmittelbar*): intuitive, naïve, "I just know it." Not developed or worked through. Not *thought out*. Opposed to: MEDIATED, thought through.

IN ITSELF (*an sich*): potential or "implicit"; considered separately, not as an object for us only, unreflective: essentially or intrinsically. Each of these meanings occurs often throughout the *Phenomenology*. Hegel says that a newborn baby is "in itself"—it is real, certainly, but only potentially human. Kant's "thing-in-itself" is the thing considered apart from any possible experience we might have of it. Spirit or consciousness is at first "in itself" in that it is unreflective. Often, Hegel distinguishes between a form of consciousness in itself, or how *it* sees certain matters, and "for us," or how we see the same phenom-

ena. For example, hedonism, in itself, may think that pleasure is the greatest good, but we can see, from our superior standpoint, that the hedonist does not primarily seek pleasure but rather something else. Notice that, in this usage, “in itself” is not contrasted with “for itself” but rather is more or less equivalent to it; it is one of the more misleading clichés in Hegel pedagogy that “in itself” and “for itself” are always contrasting terms (a projection back from Sartre, perhaps, who borrowed these terms from Hegel and did turn them into a fixed opposition). But “in itself” and “for itself” are opposed only when the meanings are, respectively, “potential” and “actual.” Sometimes, “in itself” means “from a limited perspective,” e.g. “In itself, eugenics isn’t a malevolent conception; it becomes that when in the hands of racist zealots.” Similarly, “in itself” means, “at its core” or essentially, e.g. “In itself, it’s a good idea, but the execution is faulty.” All of this becomes a problem, however, only if one insists on construing “in itself” (and “for itself”) as technical terminology. It is not, but, as in English, a perfectly ordinary colloquialism which has its meaning clarified in context. The one usage that is technical is the Kantian conception of “things in themselves,” but this usage is mostly limited to chapters 1–3.

IN AND FOR ITSELF (*an und für sich*): completely developed; the Absolute, God, Spirit actualized.

INDIVIDUAL (*einzel*n (adj.), *Individuum*): a single person or thing. Opposed to: CONCEPT, SPIRIT. INDIVIDUALITY (*Einzelheit*). Opposed to: spirituality (*Geistigkeit*)

INTERNAL PRINCIPLE: in biology, the organism’s drive for self-preservation. In consciousness and philosophy, the drive for total comprehension as well. Intrinsic motivation, as in doing an activity for its own sake. See TELEOLOGY.

INTUITION (*Anschauung*): direct or immediate acquaintance through the senses or through unconceptualized experience. In Kant, the element of sensibility, conceptualized by the understanding. Hegel does not talk about intuition and pure sense experience at all, except negatively. There is nothing to be said of an unconceptualized experience, if, indeed, one could call it an *experience* at all. Opposed to: CONCEPT.

INTUITIONISM: a philosophical movement (lead in Hegel’s time by F. Jacobi) which believed that one could have absolute knowledge only by direct and unconceptualized experience (on the grounds that concepts *distort* such experience).

INFINITE: self-contained, absolutely, autonomous, organic. *Not*: unending, eternal. Opposed to: finite. In the *Logic* (94, 95), “genuine

infinite" is absolute self-containment; "false infinity" is simply "negative," an endless series. Any living thing is "infinite" in the sense that it is a self-contained system (*Phenomenology*, chap. 4). Notice that something "infinite" in one perspective can be "finite" from another. A living thing is "infinite" as living, but of course it is limited and dependent on its surroundings, its species and other living things. Thus the only truly infinite being is the living universe, or absolute Spirit.

KNOWLEDGE (*wissen, kenntnis, bekennt*): warranted, true comprehension. Kant had argued that the object of knowledge could not be known to be the thing-in-itself; moreover, principles of morality and religion, as well as the most general rational principles about the world, could not be *known* to be true. This leads Hegel to accuse Kant of separating knowledge (that is, warranted comprehension) and truth (that is, the things-in-themselves), and to argue a more comprehensive notion of knowing, which includes the reflections of reason, the process of coming to know as well as *what* one knows, and the principles of morality, the doctrines of religion, and the most general principles about the world (for example, that the universe is necessarily a unity). Opposed to: mere belief or ignorance, naïve certainty, inarticulate apprehension.

LIFE (*Leben*): self-contained movement, capable of growth and purposive activity. Sometimes, "infinity," since both terms mean "self-contained." (For example, in *Phenomenology*, chaps. 4 and 5.)

LIVING SUBSTANCE (*lebendige Substanz*, or just *das Lebendige*): independent being; a living thing; ultimately, Spirit. (*Phenomenology*, chap. 5)

LOGIC (*Logik*): Most generally, the manipulation of concepts. In Hegel's terminology, "The system of the Concept," the "science of the Idea in and for itself, in the abstract medium of thought." The *Phenomenology* was considered by Hegel to be the introduction to the *Logic*, because it supposedly established the view of concepts in their own realm, prior to (and more real than) the objects instantiating them. For Hegel, however, logic is never wholly separable from the experience determined by these concepts (unlike contemporary formal logic).

MEDIATION (*Vermittlung*): taking time and trouble, worked over, conceptualized, reflected upon. A "mediated" dispute: talking things over. Sometimes, it means "over time," and occasionally it means simply, "dependent on something else." Opposed to: IMMEDIATE.

MOMENT (*moment*): an essential but partial aspect, a stage. Not necessarily temporal. "A moment of the Absolute" one aspect of reality; cf. "a blossom is a moment of the flowering plant."

NECESSARY (*notwendige*): demonstrable, for “reasons” (*Gründen*). Opposed to: accidental, arbitrary, pointless, or for merely *personal* reasons. “Necessity” is a teleological notion in Hegel, and must always be construed as necessary *in order to* do something, be something, reach some goal.

NEGATIVE, NEGATIVITY (*negativ, negativität*): different from, opposed to, *other than*. Opposed to: complete, incorporated. “Subject” as “pure and simple negativity” means *other than* everything which is its object. (Cf. Kant’s transcendental Ego.) A merely “negative” suggestion is one that does not suggest an alternative; a person is “negative” if he or she will not cooperate with others.

OBJECT (*Gegenstand*): “standing against,” what a form of consciousness is “about.” Opposed to: CONCEPT, in the early chapters of the *Phenomenology*, SUBJECT in later chapters (and in the *Logic*).

PARTICULAR (*einzel*n): a definite and localizable entity in space and time. A particular, in consciousness, is a particular object. A particular, in the later sections of the *Phenomenology*, is an individual person. Opposed to: UNIVERSAL.

POSITIVITY (*positivität*): in the Preface, inclusive. Opposed to: NEGATIVE. But sometimes in later chapters it means “authoritarian.” Opposed to: natural or rational.

RATIONAL: necessary, fully developed in accordance with its internal principle. (“The actual is rational. . . .”) Having good reasons (within a context); purposeful. Sometimes, reflective, thoughtful, articulate, capable of making a case. Opposed to: ACCIDENTAL, POINTLESS, UNREFLECTIVE.

REAL (*real*): existing, an object of consciousness. *Not* the same as ACTUAL.

REALITY (*Realität*): all that exists, that is, everything. *Not* ACTUALITY, not the ABSOLUTE. Exists in fact rather than merely possible, but not necessarily developed, comprehended or comprehensible.

REASON (*Vernunft*): “purposive activity.” Conceptual and reflective thought. Use of concepts in *self*-understanding. Opposed to: UNDERSTANDING. (*Der List der Vernunft* - “the cunning of reason.”) Includes practical, aesthetic, religious, as well as theoretical reason. The ultimate “purpose” of reason is to comprehend *total unity*, to break down false or limited distinctions, and to resolve conflicts.

REFLECTION (*Reflexion*): taking consciousness as its own object, thinking about thinking, examining (as opposed to employing) the understanding. Hegel sometimes distinguishes “reflection” from

"speculation," the former as mere partial analysis, the latter as holistic thinking.

SCIENCE (*Wissenschaft*): in Aristotle, a science was any system of true propositions. Its paradigm was mathematics. For Fichte, who also insisted that philosophy must be a science, Science was a system of propositions each of which was either a "first principle" or axiom, or else a theorem that could be *deduced* from these. But Science need not be quantitative or strictly deductive (chemistry or mathematics), *Geisteswissenschaften*, or the "humanities," are a systematized discipline or Science too. What Science must be is a *discipline*. Hegel also insists, though this follows from the fact that Science consists of a system of *propositions*, that the medium of science be the *Concept*, that is, it must be reflective and articulate. This means too that science is necessarily *public*, not, as Hegel says in the Preface, "the esoteric possession of a few individuals." Thus intuitionism is not Science because intuitions need not (cannot?) be shared. We all share the same concepts, however, for concepts are essentially impersonal.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS (*selbstbewusstsein*): self-aware. More like self-confident than simply self-conscious in our sense of embarrassed, insecure. Taking oneself as object. (*Phenomenology*. chap. 4). Opposed to: CONSCIOUSNESS (of things). Self-consciousness, unlike reason, is strictly personal and individual self-consciousness.

SELF-IDENTITY: identity. Hegel uses this expression when discussing Schelling, then later in the account of absolute knowledge. His characterization of it in the Preface as " $A = A$ " makes it look trivial; in fact, this expression is shorthand borrowed from Leibniz, via Fichte and Schelling. " $A = A$ " in Leibniz, called "the law of identity," refers to the thesis that all analytically true propositions are logically equivalent; they have the same content. Leibniz argued that, in God's eyes, all truths are analytic and necessary, and the expression itself came to mean, in effect, that no distinctions are ultimately real, that identity with itself is the only ultimate equivalence. (This can be rendered trivial, of course, by simply pointing out that nothing can be identical to anything else, or there would not be "anything else.")

What Hegel means by this expression, therefore, is that certain philosophical divisions of reality are not to be taken as ultimate, for example, between consciousness and its objects, between the form and content of experience, between nature and freedom, and that, ultimately, self-identity, or the Absolute, is the only reality. As a heuristic principle, it should be read as: "always remember that distinctions have significance only in context; we are actually trying to distinguish

two aspects of the same thing." Self-identity is therefore the thesis that reality is necessarily one, a thesis which may seem obvious but which, nevertheless, Kant failed to prove in his philosophy. Self-identity, for Hegel, is the identity of the whole. He is not concerned (except negatively) with individual self-identity, the problem so popular among British philosophers following Locke and Hume.

SPECULATION: In the *Phenomenology*, dialectical reason. In the *Logic*, "higher" than dialectic, the "total comprehension of the dialectic and the unity of propositions in their opposition." Seeing all the various forms of consciousness as stages in self-actualization. *Not:* wild thinking. Opposed to: routine everyday experience and "common sense."

SPIRIT (*Geist*): the subject writ-large, including the objects it determines for itself. **SPIRIT** is not opposed to **SUBSTANCE**. The subject and subject matter of the *Phenomenology*, it includes all of us and everything in human experience. It is simply, the world, aware of itself as a self-conscious and comprehensible unity.

SUBJECT (*Subjekt*): that which is *other than* all possible objects of consciousness ("pure and simple negativity"). The "I" of Descartes and Kant. That which is self-aware or can become self-aware. All of Hegel's researches begin with the subject, from the subjective standpoint, from the Cartesian position that it is my (our) knowledge and my (our) experience of the world that is under examination in philosophy.

But Hegel denies that the subject is an individual self, and that it can be intelligibly distinguished from the objects it is aware of. Thus subject is substance too, and substance becomes subject, Hegel tells us, when it starts to become aware of itself. Hegel rejects the idea that knowledge is "subjective" but means by this that the objects of knowledge are not merely personal and private but rather shared and "objective," even if it is also true that it makes no sense to speak of such objects apart from their being, "for us," objects of knowledge.

SUBSTANCE (*Substanz*): stuff, what exists in-itself, by definition, independent of anything else. Thus Spinoza insisted there could be but one substance, and Leibniz, while holding that there was a plurality of substances, refused to allow them to have anything to do with each other. Substance is not distinguished from subject, in Continental philosophy. For Descartes, the subject was a (thinking) substance; for Spinoza, substance includes subject, and for Leibniz, substances are subjects (monads). For Hegel, Spirit is both subject and substance.

SYSTEM: the ideal of a philosophical system was a pervasive demand among the post-Kantian philosophers. The Kantian Reinhold

had begun with a "systematization" of Kant's philosophy: Fichte also considered his philosophy to be a "systematization" or "completion" of Kant. A *system* meant a *deductive* system, a set of first principles from which various theorems could be deduced. But the term applies to any comprehensive and coherent set of propositions whose interconnections are demonstrated.

TELEOLOGY, PURPOSIVENESS (*Zwecklichkeit*): development according to an "internal principle." A biological metaphor: an organism's "internal purpose" is to keep on living. The "internal purpose" of consciousness (and philosophy) is total comprehension. Aristotle is mentioned by name as the author of the philosophical vision of the teleological universe, striving to develop its own self-awareness. The transitions in the *Phenomenology* are all *teleologically necessary*, that is, aimed at the purpose (*Zweck*) of attaining such absolute comprehension.

THOUGHT (*Gedanke*): conceptualized experience, but not the thought or the experience of any particular person. ("I just had the thought that . . .") Cf. Frege's similar notion: the thought stands behind all of the particular utterances of a sentence and its synonyms, giving them meaning. In Hegel, a thought is a form of experience. Pure thoughts, abstracted from experience, are the subject matter of the *Logic*. Thoughts as experienced are the subject matter of the *Phenomenology*. "Thought-determinations" = giving form to experience through thought, e.g., in Kant's terms, "constituting" experience.

TRUTH (*das Wahre; die Wahrheit*): "the way the world is," but for Hegel, the "way the world is" cannot be other than the way it is "for us." The *Phenomenology* is essentially a theory of truth, that is, a theory about truth ("the truth about Truth"). Hegel is not particularly concerned with truths ("When it rains it pours"), but rather with the nature of Truth ("What is truth?"). His emphasis on the need to know the details of experience does not entail that, to have Absolute Truth, the philosopher need in fact know every particular truth (the number of rabbits in Australia, etc.). Truth for Hegel, is not just the object of science and knowledge, but the *goal* of every human endeavor; in fact, truth means "goal." The truth of art is beauty, the truth of ethics is right action, the truth of religion is God. Truth, like experience and the Concept, evolves and thus, without paradox, includes the errors we make too, as part of the learning process.

UNCERTAINTY (*Ungewissheit*): scepticism, questioning, insecurity. Opposed to: **CERTAINTY**.

UNCONDITIONED (*unbedingt*): infinite, self-contained, complete in

itself, “no longer compelled to go beyond itself.” Context-free, not dependent on particular experiences, circumstances; not derived from the senses. Unlimited. Opposed to: **CONDITIONED**.

UNDERSTANDING (*Verstehen*): in Kant, the application of the concepts to sensations to yield experience. Unreflective knowledge of the world. Opposed to: **REASON**, but also to mere (common sense) certainty; experience without conceptualization (*Phenomenology* chaps. 1–3.) A fixed set of concepts; sometimes, *mechanical* thinking, the application of quantitative principles (as in Newton’s physics).

UNIVERSAL (*Allgemein*): non-particular, without specific location in space and time, and logically accessible to everyone. Concepts and numbers are universals, not in space and time, sharable by anyone. Properties, according to Hegel, are “conditioned universals,” while Kant’s categories (e.g. “substance”) are “unconditioned universals” (the difference between “perception” and “understanding,” respectively). The color red is a universal because it may be instantiated by any number of particular objects; the concept “dog” is a universal because it can be instantiated by any number of dogs. And **SPIRIT** is universal because it includes all possible particulars, including all human beings. Opposed to: **PARTICULAR**.

WHOLE (*Ganze*): everything, concrete, the totality of experience and its objects. “The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development” (*Phenomenology*, 20). Refers to a whole *process* (of development) as well as a whole set (of propositions, etc.). The whole must be distinguished from the plurality of particulars within it. (Cf. Heidegger’s “worldhood of the world.”) One can know the whole (that is, the absolute Truth of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*) without knowing every particular within it, and one can know all the details of something (e.g. all the parts of the machine or a living organism) without having a conception of the whole at all. The whole is a comprehensible as well as comprehensive unity, a structure as well as a totality.

I hope that this admittedly inadequate glossary will help take the sting out of Hegel’s terminology for most readers, but the point to be made again and again is that Hegel’s insistence that concepts are context-dependent makes a straightforward “definition” of these terms impossible, except by reference to other terms just as obscure. Notice, for instance, that an object might be said to be “immediate” in one context but “mediated” in another, just as (I will argue) an object might be said to be “observable” in one scientific context but “hypothetical”

in another, or as a bit of behavior might seem wholly "natural" in one social setting but be considered entirely "artificial" in another (e.g. formal courtesies at a dinner party and an intimate drink with a friend by the fireplace, respectively). A phenomenon might be said to be "infinite" in one perspective and, a little later, "finite" in another; or universal in one context, but particular in another; or unconditional in one form of life, conditional in another. But this will be upsetting only if one takes Hegel to be providing some sort of formal system, which he emphatically is not. Indeed, the whole point of the *Phenomenology* is to show that there can be no such system—that contextualism and the flexibility of our ways of conceiving the world are the ultimate rules of human experience. But it would be a mistake to treat Hegel's often painful terminology as too profound; like Kant, who really did try to be rigorous, Hegel sometimes seems simply incapable of writing philosophy with even the most minimal terminological consistency that we would expect of any undergraduate. The mask of "science" is a sham; in the ultimate analysis, we should rather conclude that what appears at times to be profound is wholly unnecessary and tolerable (in both Hegel and Kant) only because the genius of the over-all performance makes forbearance worth our while.

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Part II

Hitching the Highway of Despair—An
Analysis of the *Phenomenology*

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Chapter Six

Against Method (The “Introduction” to the Phenomenology)

The need to begin with the subject itself, without preliminary observations, is felt nowhere more strongly than in the science of logic . . . not only the scheme of philosophic method, but also the very concept of philosophy in general belongs to the content of logic . . . what Logic is cannot be set out beforehand. —*Science of Logic*

The proper introduction to the *Phenomenology* is its Introduction. Unlike the horrendous Preface, it states clearly and without apology or arrogance what is to come, what problems we face, and how they are to be overcome. But as we have anticipated, what the Introduction introduces is not exactly the *Phenomenology* as we know it, but rather the book that Hegel intended to write, a shorter book about logic and metaphysics, in the post-Kantian “phenomenological” mode. The *Phenomenology* was to be the introduction to the discussion of logic and metaphysics, and this means that the original text—what the Introduction introduces, was a much more limited book, concerned only with questions of knowledge and more or less devoid of the more historical and more “practical” concerns of chapters 4–7, some of which were to appear in another volume of the “system.” And so, what the Introduction introduces is only the first three chapters of the present text, perhaps a small part of chapter 4, the first half of chapter 5 on “Reason” and, of course, chapter 8 on “Absolute Knowing.”

The Introduction is concerned with a single, distinctive, and familiar problem—the tendency of modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes and Locke in particular, to end up in scepticism, which Hegel considered an utterly absurd position.¹ Even Kant, who had pro-

1. Again, we must distinguish scepticism in its modern epistemological form, from Skepticism in its ancient version, which does play a key role in the *PG*, chapter 4B.

vided the basis for the refutation of scepticism, denied that we could know “the things in themselves,” or what Hegel calls “the Absolute.” Hegel considers the idea that we might not (or cannot) know the Absolute so absurd that he considers it beyond refutation; what is required instead is diagnosis, so that we can see how philosophers have gone wrong and correct them, thus dismissing this all but unintelligible position before we even begin.

The irony is that the slippery slide to scepticism began with philosophers who demanded precisely the opposite; Descartes insisted from the first of his *Meditations* that he should have to prove beyond a doubt those beliefs worth believing. He was so cautious about making mistakes, about the possibility of accepting as true some proposition unproven, that he even began as a matter of method by doubting every belief, assuming it false until he could prove it true. John Locke too, disgusted with the lack of progress and the absence of evidence in traditional metaphysics, began with a method to protect him from error; he insisted that every idea that deserved to be called “knowledge” would have to be supported by the evidence of his senses, by an appeal to experience which could not be disputed. But both Descartes and Locke ended up in sceptical quandaries, which their followers soon established even if they would not have recognized this themselves. The reason for their ironic fate was precisely, in each case, the method that they invented to protect them from error. The result of their methods was the most erroneous suggestion—that we might not, in fact, know anything at all.

This sceptical conclusion as such, perhaps, did not fully emerge in the modern tradition until David Hume stated it in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, and again in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.² Hume made it very clear that something had gone seriously wrong—in the empiricist tradition of John Locke, in particular—but in the whole epistemological tradition beginning with Descartes, more generally. And yet, Hume himself wholly accepted that tradition, and it was within that tradition that he derived the conclusions that threatened to reduce it to utter nonsense.

Kant was properly horrified by what Hume had done, “awakened from his dogmatic slumbers.” And Kant too undertook the project of saving the truth of our most fundamental beliefs by developing a new method which could be used to prove them. In other words, he too

2. But see Richard Popkin's genealogy of the general epistemological theme in his *History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (New York: Humanities Press, 1964). Hume was a sceptical late-comer in a long philosophical tradition.

stayed within that tradition, which we can describe as the Cartesian-empiricist tradition of trying to *prove* the truth of what we believe—or establish the “foundations of knowledge”—by developing a *method*, a set of principles and procedures *antecedent* to knowledge itself. Needless to say, the principles of method could not presuppose the beliefs that were to be established as knowledge, for this would be viciously circular. But this too severely limited the field of beliefs that one could begin by believing, and, not surprisingly, most philosophers presupposed precisely the principles they were trying to prove. Descartes claimed to suspend his belief in mathematics, but he used the whole system of deductive rules of inference, on the model of Euclidean geometry, in staging his proofs. He doubted God’s existence but nevertheless invoked Him when necessary. Both Locke and Kant insisted that we could not experience “the things themselves” but nevertheless insisted that experience would be incomprehensible without them, and most dramatically of all, Hume rested the whole of his sceptical argument on the impossibility of our knowing the necessity of cause and effect relationships, which he proved by presupposing the cause and effect relations of a “physiological” model of mind.

With this in mind, we can appreciate Hegel’s suspicion that the problem was to be found not in the subtlety of scepticism but rather in the very idea of a *method* which would be antecedent to and independent of the knowledge it sought to establish. He says, “perhaps the fear of falling into error is itself the error,” and suggests that, instead of starting with a method, we simply dive into the subject-matter. (Again, this is why the Preface is not only unnecessary but an actual obstacle to understanding the book; it looks as if it is a preliminary treatise on method, which is precisely what it cannot be.) The analogy he uses is the idea of learning to swim before one gets in the water. The idea is absurd. One cannot do it, but even if one did practice some strokes before getting in over one’s head, there would still be the same problem of matching up what one has learned in the abstract with the concrete problem of swimming. One learns to swim by swimming, and that includes making mistakes, finding one’s way, learning by doing. And so too, Hegel suggests, one learns what knowledge is, not by developing a method with which to prove it, but by assuming, from the outset, that we do know something—quite a lot, in fact—that we are in contact with the Absolute, the things of the world, and do not need a method to prove this. Indeed, it is the search for a method to move from our experience to the Absolute that has

made it appear, in these great philosophers of the recent past, as if it is possible that we are not in immediate contact with the Absolute, and therefore might not know the Absolute at all.

The second irony here is that Hegel, writing in a tradition that scorns and in any case is usually unintelligible to "common sense," begins with a defense of the common-sense position—that scepticism is absurd, that knowledge (in general) needs no defense, and that if a philosophy ends up in scepticism, so much for that philosophy. Hegel is here arguing against such philosophers as Locke and Hume, who were self-declared defenders of "common sense," as their court of ultimate appeal.³ But against them, Hegel is trying to get rid of what is usually called "method" in philosophy, the very idea that one should begin with a set of rules and cautionary principles *before* one enters into the subject-matter itself. Hegel is thus attacking not just a particular philosophical method, not just methods that end up with certain results, and not just the way that certain philosophers have construed the quest for an adequate theory of knowledge. He is attacking the quest for an adequate theory of knowledge. He is attacking the very idea of a "theory of knowledge," or what most philosophers today call *epistemology*. According to Hegel, the very idea of a "theory" that precedes the knowledge itself is a manifest absurdity.⁴

The problem that Hegel uses to define the project of the *Phenomenology* has two facets; one is the general rejection of "method" in philosophy and the insistence that we jump into our subject-matter and not diddle around with preliminaries. (For that reason, the Introduction is mercifully short, only a dozen pages.) The second is more specific, and is concerned with a substantial set of philosophical presuppositions which have formed the heart of modern philosophy and with which the problem of scepticism can be specifically identified. Quite contrary to its insistence that philosophy begin without assuming any particular metaphysical thesis, epistemology begins with a metaphysical picture of ourselves and our relationship to the world which is now so familiar that it has become virtually self-evident to

3. Hegel cites Locke explicitly in this regard in his "Faith and Knowledge" (1802).

4. Of course, epistemology can be construed much more broadly than this narrow characterization, and the even more specific characterization to follow. Epistemology can be construed as the over-all concern for the bounds and inner relations and nature of knowledge without in any way raising this problem of the *possibility* of knowledge, which is what Hegel is challenging. In this broader perspective not only Hegel but Plato and almost every other philosopher becomes an "epistemologist" too. What is specifically rejected here is that version of method which has become so rampant not only in traditional empiricism but even more so in latter-day "phenomenology" (in Edmund Husserl in particular) and in some of the "analytic" or "linguistic" methods of the logical positivists and "ordinary language" philosophers more recently.

us; it is the idea that we come to know the world through our individual experiences, through “representations” or copies or impressions and ideas of reality rather than through immediate contact with the things themselves—the Absolute.

Knowledge and the “Things-in-Themselves”

It is a natural assumption that in philosophy, before we start to deal with its proper subject-matter, viz. the actual cognition [*Erkenntnis*] of what truly is, one must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers it.

—*Phenomenology*

Hegel's attack on traditional epistemology from Descartes to Kant begins with an attack on two metaphors. Both metaphors begin with the assumption that consciousness (experience, knowledge, cognition) is one thing; reality—the Absolute—is something else. The epistemological question, then, is how consciousness ever reaches out beyond itself to the Absolute, to know the things themselves. The question begins, presumably, from a seemingly quite self-evident everyday truth—that our experience is “inside of us,” in consciousness, but the thing we experience, the thing itself, is outside of us, in the world. But from this innocent starting point, two insidious metaphors enter to explain the relation between them; the first is an active metaphor—that consciousness (or knowledge) is an “instrument” for getting hold of the things themselves. The second is a more passive metaphor, that consciousness (or knowledge) is a medium,” perhaps a mirror, for example, through which we can “see” the Absolute.⁵ From the two metaphors emerges the intolerable conclusion, that we do not know the things themselves, since they are inevitably distorted by the instrument or the medium through which we come to know them.

Now if Hegel were simply arguing against his predecessors by analogy, arguing *as if* they held such a picture at the bottom of their epistemologies, his argument would not go any further than the demand that the epistemologists say with more literal clarity what it is that they

5. For a recent analysis and thorough-going criticism of this traditional metaphor, much in the spirit of Hegel's own critique in the *PG*, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980).

mean. But this is not what he is doing. These metaphors, he claims, are part of the traditional epistemological enterprise as such, whether or not they are recognized as metaphors by the philosophers who have used them and treated them as literal scientific theories. And they are necessitated by the original more or less common-sense move, the distinction between consciousness and its objects, which itself, it turns out, is a metaphor too, and an extremely destructive one.

The very idea that "there is a boundary that separates cognition and the Absolute" (73) presupposes the invention—not the "discovery"—of the mind.⁶ What seems to us no more than an obvious observation—namely, that each of us has a mind or consciousness with various sensations, ideas and experiences *in* it, like marbles in a tin can—is in fact an insidious distortion of the nature of experience, which is not a self-enclosed realm of its own with some problematic reference to things outside of itself; it is the awareness-of-things. This point, anticipated by Kant in his notion of "phenomenon," becomes in this century the central notion of "intentionality" of Husserl and other "phenomenologists." In its usual formulation, this means that there cannot be consciousness without objects, nor can there be objects without their being the objects for a consciousness. But the ontological status of those objects—that is, whether they exist "in themselves" or not—is left unclear, in both Kant and Husserl. It is this spatial metaphor, the mind as a mysterious realm *in* which there are experiences and *beyond* which are physical objects "in themselves" which gives rise to scepticism. For once one accepts the idea of a "boundary" between the "inside" and the "outside," then crossing that boundary, while remaining always on the "inside," becomes impossible.

The distinction between cognition (knowledge) and the Absolute (things-in-themselves) gives rise to a certain theory of truth—the "correspondence" theory of truth, according to which our experiences "correspond," it is hoped, to the things themselves. One must say "it is hoped" because the problem for the theory is that one can never check to see whether in fact our experiences do correspond, since all we ever know "immediately" are our own experiences. The rest we know by inference, or on faith—because we believe that our experiences are caused by the objects themselves or because, as in Descartes, we believe that God in His Goodness would not allow us to be fooled. But effects do not always resemble their causes, and there is no assurance whatever that the representations in our consciousness are indeed copies or resemblances of the things that caused them.

6. See Walter Kaufmann, *The Discovery of the Mind* (New York; McGraw-Hill, 1980), vol. 1, part iii, on Hegel.

Indeed, they might be entirely different, which is why Kant insisted that the thing-in-itself must remain always an unknown to us, the "unknown x" which causes our experience but can never be known itself through experience. Moreover, there may not even be a thing-in-itself, for it is always possible that our experiences are caused in us not by objects but by God, as both Leibniz and Bishop Berkeley suggested, or even by an Evil Genius, as Descartes unhappily proposed. And as for the suggestion that God in His Goodness will not allow us to be fooled, that may be permissible as theology but it is surely a last gasp effort as epistemology. What we want to know is, *how* can we know, in general and in any particular case, whether our experience is "true" or not. And that means: whether or not it "corresponds" to reality, the things-in-themselves.

It was Kant, again, who radically revised this traditional picture, even while staying within the tradition. He left standing the empiricist idea that our experience is partially caused by objects affecting us; this passive aspect of our experience was what he called "the manifold of intuition", the barrage of sensations which are the raw material of experience. But he added that our experience is also *constituted* (not just understood) by the faculty of understanding, and so what we know are not just the sensations caused in us or the objects in themselves (which we can never know), but rather the objects as we constitute them for ourselves, through the concepts of the understanding. This means, as Hegel restates it in the *Phenomenology*, that we do not know the objects in themselves, but we do know objects as they are constituted in themselves *for us*. That is, we create objects of knowledge that seem to be "outside" of us, but they are not; they are only created to seem that way. The real objects, "in themselves," are still indeed outside of us, out of reach, known "immediately" only to God (through "intellectual intuition").

What Kant had done, according to Hegel, was to confuse the boundaries considerably,—and to add a powerful new active element ("constitution") to our concept of the relationship of the mind to its objects. Hegel thoroughly accepts the latter, and for this he acknowledges Kant "the point of departure of modern philosophy."⁷ But for the former he has nothing but abuse, and much of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* is concerned with finishing the job that Fichte and Schelling had already undertaken—to purge the Kantian philosophy of the "thing-in-itself" altogether, or rather, to show that the things of experience (phenomena) and the things-in-themselves

7. *Science of Logic*, vol. I, 44.

(noumena) were one and the same. By destroying the concept of objects “outside” of experience, Hegel would destroy the idea of the “inside” of experience as well. And he would get rid of the idea that we might not know the things-in-themselves—the Absolute.

It is with Kant and the epistemological tradition in mind that we should read through the Introduction. The two metaphors—the instrument and the medium—are now easily recognizable as the two faculties of knowledge for Kant—the activities of the understanding (the instrument) and the passive reception of sensibility, “the manifold of intuition” (the medium). The same two metaphors apply to virtually every other philosopher of the tradition too, with the emphasis in most on the passive “medium” imagery (Locke’s “blank tablet” view of the mind, for example) rather than the more active Kantian image of the “instrument” of the understanding, which constitutes rather than simply recognizes the objects of experience. Kant’s own way of presenting these covert metaphors was to refer to the objects we know as “phenomena”—that is, *conditioned* by the forms of sensibility and the concepts of our understanding, as opposed to the *unconditioned* objects in-themselves, which could be known only by God. Here is where Hegel begins his argument; if what we know is “conditioned” by the properties of the medium and the manipulations of the instrument, what right do we have to say that we know these things at all. At most, we know them *for us*; but then, we do not know them in themselves; we do not know the truth, and therefore, we do not *know* anything at all.

Hegel’s argument here is directed, again in alliance with common sense, against a certain kind of Kantian double talk. The common-sense position is that only knowing the things themselves counts as the truth; “the Absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute” (75). The Kantian double talk is the suggestion that there is another sense of truth “true for us” even if this “truth” does not correspond to the things themselves;

There is a type of cognition which, though it does not cognize the Absolute as Science aims to, is still true, and that cognition in general [knowledge of phenomena] though it be incapable of grasping the Absolute, is still capable of grasping other kinds of truth. But we gradually come to see that this kind of talk which goes back and forth [between knowing mere phenomena and knowing things as they really are] only leads to a hazy distinction between an absolute truth and some other kind of truth, and that words like “absolute,” “cognition,” etc. presuppose a meaning which has yet to be ascertained. (*Phenomenology*, 75)

Either we know the truth (the things-in-themselves) or we do not. Either knowledge needs no defense from philosophy or scepticism has already won the game. Kant confuses the issues. Either the “phenomena” are the things themselves—the way things *really* are—or they are not.

The idea that we know things only as “conditioned” by our minds is an easy point to make in philosophy; consider the way the world looks when our senses are altered even slightly, with colored glasses or a drug that renders us hypersensitive. Consider the difference between the vision of bees (who see ultraviolet light) and the vision of dogs (who do not see colors at all). Consider the difference between the way a primitive animist sees the world (full of living things, including living weather, living rocks, living water) and the way a hard-headed materialist sees the world (as matter in motion, as particles or electromagnetic forces in space). How could one possibly deny that our experience is conditioned by the medium (the senses) through which we receive our sensations?—and by the concepts with which we render our experience intelligible?

The problem, if course, is that this image of “conditioning” carries with it the inference that what we see is inevitably *distorted*, and even if it is not distorted, we would have no way of telling whether it is or not. Are red things “really” red? A long line of philosophical theories have said that they are not, that the “red” is in us—the effect of properties in the thing itself, to be sure, but those properties are not themselves red. So argued John Locke, and it was not difficult for Bishop Berkeley to use the same arguments to show that there were *no* properties to be predicated of the material thing itself; all properties were “in us,” as ideas. But if one can argue that red things may not be red, could they be some other color? Are certain materials that seem colorless to us, but can be seen by bees and butterflies, “really” that other color? If the sunlight systematically makes things appear a few shades further along the spectrum, does that mean that (even if we could not know this) things are “really” some other color? And if, as Kant suggested, space and time are a priori forms *for us*, but not true of the universe “in itself,” could it be that space and time might be, for some other creature or “in themselves,” very different from our own experience, with very different properties?

Once one begins these speculations, it is difficult to end them. Once one begins to wonder what the properties of the world might be apart from our experience of them, apart from our peculiar ways of conceiving of them, there is no natural stopping point. (Hegel’s ultimate

argument against this is the “inverted world” section of chapter 3, in which he whimsically suggests that perhaps the world-in-itself is at every turn the exact opposite of the way it is for us.) Once one supposes that the world is “conditioned” for us, there seems to be no way out of the sceptical slide that we have started. *Unless*, that is, one gives up the basic premise, the “correspondence” view of truth, the idea that things-in-themselves are something “outside” of consciousness and that the things of our experience are “conditioned.”

One need not deny the common-sense observation that our experience changes dramatically with the slightest change in our senses, or that the world would look very different to us if our beliefs (concepts) were radically altered. What has to be denied is that our senses and our concepts are *means* to know the world (a medium and an instrument) rather than themselves part and parcel of the world we know.⁸ We do not begin with the data of consciousness and *infer* the existence and the nature of objects “outside” of us; we begin by *being in* the world and only later, during moments of reflection, begin to raise questions about the nature of objects and the role of consciousness and the world. This is why, inevitably, the empiricists ended up treating as an indisputable part of their method scientific findings and theories about physiology and the senses which were not even known a few years before. But if they were willing to take for granted the existence of the sense organs as well as the very complex and often controversial cause and effect relations between them and our sensations, why not just begin by admitting that we do know the world, in general? There is no problem of knowledge in general; there is no sense to be made of scepticism—since in order to raise our doubts about knowledge we have to already presuppose substantial knowledge about the world and, more dubiously, about the existence and autonomous nature of our own consciousness.

There is no question about the *correspondence* of our experience to the world, *in general*. In particular cases, of course, we can come to question the validity of an experience—a hallucination or a mirage, for example—but we do so only by comparing that experience with the rest of our experience, and seeing that it does not fit—*except* as a hallucination or a mirage. In general, we experience the world, not as a causal connection or correspondence between two things—consciousness and the things-themselves—but as a simple identity—the

8. Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*—“What? And others even say that the external world is the work of our organs? But then, our body, as a part of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be—the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*. . . .” (“On the Prejudices of Philosophers,” 15).

world-as-experienced. But to say, "the world-as-experienced" need not suggest the specter of some other world, some world-in-itself apart from and forever "outside" of experience. Nor need the idea ever arise—except in a paranoid fantasy or a philosophical seminar—that our experience has been "conditioned" such that we do not know the world as it is in fact at all. We know the world as it is in itself, which is not to say that it could not be known in some other way, and differently. This is what Hegel means when he says that we know the Absolute. What remains in the rest of the book is for us to expand our repertoire of perspectives, to see the world in different ways—so that we can ideally reach that all-encompassing viewpoint where we can also say that we know the Absolute absolutely. In fact, I would argue, this ideal is never reached; there is no absolute viewpoint which encompasses all of the others. There are just indefinitely many more viewpoints. But what Hegel does succeed in showing us in the Introduction, before the journey even begins, is that knowledge, if it is anything at all, is knowledge of things-in-themselves, knowledge of the Absolute.

As for that "fear of error" that we discussed in the beginning of the chapter, which leads to the demand for a method to protect against mistakes, Hegel says that this is itself a mistake; "should we not be concerned as to whether this fear of error is not just the error itself?" (73) and "should we not turn around and mistrust this very mistrust?" (74). Indeed, it is in the statement of method, which supposedly precedes any claims whatever about the nature of the world—the Absolute, that one begins by presupposing "that the Absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other." This "in fact takes a great deal for granted" which, on examination, proves to be most doubtful—"certain ideas about cognition as an *instrument* and as a *medium*" (74). (Note that at this point Hegel abruptly shifts the metaphor, to "a difference between ourselves and this cognition." This introduces a second "boundary" and a third element to the ontology Hegel is attacking—the pure self or ego *versus* the apparatus of knowledge as in Kant's distinction between the transcendental ego and the empirical content of its knowledge.) The upshot is Hegel's accusation that it is the fear of error itself that leads to the disastrous distinctions that render scepticism unavoidable and makes necessary the Kantian double talk that our knowledge of the phenomenal world, though "excluded from the Absolute" and "surely outside the truth as well, is nevertheless true, an assumption whereby what calls itself fear of error reveals itself rather as fear of the truth." (74) And here again, we find Hegel urges us onto the text proper, for one learns only by doing. It is by

making mistakes in philosophy that one learns how to do philosophy, not by first learning a method (or learning that there is no method.)

In the Preface, Hegel argued somewhat confusingly that “the truth includes what is false,” (38). We can now add, a bit more clearly, that the search for truth cannot proceed through a “fear of error” but only by taking a position (almost any will do⁹), by making mistakes and then, in our bumbling way, moving on to make more of them. Whether or not this ever leads us to the absolute Truth, this much is sure: we will never get there by hanging around in the Preface or by trying to get our method together before looking for the Truth. In a sense, to begin is to already be “in the Truth”, that is, in the world of certain knowledge. And what is undubitable, Descartes to the contrary, is the fact that, in searching for the truth, one must already have it and assume that one has it. Which raises the question,—why need one search at all? Or why did Hegel, having written the Introduction, need to write the rest of the book?

From Knowing the Absolute to Absolute Knowing

Science, in coming on the scene, is itself an appearance; in coming on the scene it is not yet Science in its developed and unfolded truth. . . . Natural consciousness will show itself to be only the concept of knowledge, or in other words, not real knowledge. (*Phenomenology*)

Once we have given up the “useless ideas” about knowledge as an “instrument” or a “medium” which are means to “get a hold of the absolute,” we find ourselves standing face-to-face, so to speak, with the world-in-itself. This may be a dazzling idea for those of us who have suffered through the rigors of epistemology since Descartes, but it is just humdrum common sense in everyday life. But to say that one is face-to-face with the world-in-itself is not at all to conclude that one knows all that much about it, that one has thought about the nature of the world or come to any adequate comprehension of it or of our knowing it. In fact, common-sensical everyday consciousness “takes itself to be real knowledge” just because it is naïvely certain, without questioning the matter at all, that it knows the world-in-itself. Hegel

9. Paul Ziff used to begin his aesthetics seminars at the University of Pennsylvania with a discussion of “the Blue Spot Theory,” i.e. a painting is good if it has a patch of blue in it. By learning to attack obvious nonsense, the students soon learned to see through not so obvious nonsense as well.

calls this common-sensical viewpoint “natural consciousness.” (In the first chapter, it reappears as “sense-certainty,” *die sinnliche Gewissheit*.) Because of its naïve certainty, Hegel assures us that it is not knowledge at all, “only the concept of knowledge;” that is, it has the idea that it knows the world without in fact knowing it. Absolute knowing, by way of contrast, is *knowing* that one knows, not only without a doubt but *beyond* doubt.

The move from “natural consciousness” to real knowledge is, of course, by way of Science (*Wissenschaft*). Science, in this context, might best be thought of simply as philosophical reflection, as raising the question how—with what warrant—“natural consciousness” claims to know the world. With “natural consciousness”, which claims with sophomoric stubborn inarticulateness that it “just knows,” the philosophical sceptic has a field day. It is a familiar scenario in introductory philosophy courses. What follows “natural consciousness” is a “pathway of doubt,” as the sceptic wedges his arguments in between experience and the things themselves, between what one always thought one knew and the absolute truth (78). But, of course, this isn’t full-blooded Science either, only Science at its mischievous and somewhat sophisticated beginnings. Like Socrates playing with one of his interlocutors in Plato’s dialogues, Science destroys our common-sense confidence in what we thought we knew. But this is only the preliminary to Science; what Science has to do now is to show us, as it raises these problems we had not seen or had not clearly seen before, what more adequate viewpoints might take their place and resolve them. And once this starts, the dialectic is under way.

The Introduction, with little fanfare, gives us our entry into the *Phenomenology*. In a quarter of the space of the Preface, Hegel tells us quite clearly that “the series of configurations which consciousness goes through along this road is, in reality, the detailed history of the education [*Bildung*] of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science” (78). In other words, we will find the Truth—the most adequate way of comprehending the world—only through the repeated overthrow of less adequate conceptions, beginning with the sceptical overthrow of our original naïve “natural” certainty. It is at this point that Hegel offers up his tribute to Descartes, though not by name;

This path is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized Concept. . . . This thorough-going scepticism is also not the scepticism with which an earnest zeal for truth and Science fancies it has prepared and equipped itself in their service: the *resolve*, in science, not to give oneself over to the thoughts of others, upon

mere authority, but to examine everything for oneself and follow only one's own conviction, or better still, to produce everything oneself, and accept only one's own deed as what is true. (*Phenomenology*, 78)

The "resolve . . . not to give oneself over . . . to examine everything . . . and accept only one's own deed as what is true" is a clear reference to Descartes's resolution in the first of his *Meditations* (1641) and his *Discourse on Method* of a few years before (1637). The "untruth of phenomenal knowledge" refers to the whole of consciousness, or what one merely *thinks* one knows; "the unrealized Concept" is Hegel's retrospective and somewhat patronizing recognition that Descartes was trying to do, in an extremely primitive way, what Hegel is about to succeed in doing. But the path itself, Hegel tells us, is not only a pathway of doubt but "a way of despair," for Descartes doubts not only a few of his beliefs, "shilly-shallying about this or that presumed truth;" he doubts *everything*, which ends, as it begins, in scepticism, the *reductio ad absurdum* of epistemology.

The reference to Descartes suggests that Hegel, like Kant, is in the modern tradition. Of course, he sees himself (as Kant saw himself, and so did Hume) as putting an end to that tradition, and so most commentators agree with Hegel that he is more outside than inside the tradition he attacks, precisely because he rejects the traditional distinctions between "outside" and "inside" consciousness. But I think it is of the most extreme importance to any interpretation of the *Phenomenology* that this is not clearly the case; Hegel is part of the tradition he attacks even if he tampers with and ultimately destroys its basic machinery. That tradition begins (as, for example, Plato and Aristotle do not) with what has been called "the first person standpoint," a basic shift of position from attending to the world to attending to one's consciousness of the world. At first, it might seem as if nothing has changed. In place of the view that the world exists and we are all in it, Descartes and the empiricists and Kant and others began with their own conscious existence and then turned to the world and asked a seemingly simple and innocent question, "How do I know that my beliefs and experiences are true?" Thus began the separation of consciousness and the world that still gives rise to the problem, "How can I know that my experiences correspond to the world?" which in turn passes into the purely polemical hands of the sceptic.

Now it is clear that Hegel does not accept the sceptical position as even an intelligible possibility, and therefore he does not accept the separation of consciousness and world. He simply acknowledges "the

Absolute," or consciousness-of(as?)-the-world. With Kant, who had argued that the understanding does not infer its laws from nature but rather imposes them, Hegel agrees that even the innocent question, "How do I know that my beliefs and experiences (in general) are true?" must be abandoned. Furthermore, Hegel goes beyond Kant in not even accepting the existence of an individual thinking self as an absolute certainty (though this will not be discussed until much later in the book) and so does not accept the Cartesian-Kantian premise, that an "I think" accompanies (or must be able to accompany) all of my "representations." Thus one might well be tempted to insist that Hegel rejects the "first person standpoint" as well, for he rejects the idea of consciousness as a separate realm, he rejects the very intelligibility of epistemology in the traditional sense, and he even rejects the idea of the self. So much for the first person standpoint, it seems. But this would be an error. "The Absolute" is an essentially first-person conception.

Hegel is just as much a part of the tradition as Descartes. He rejects the epistemological apparatus, he even rejects the self as "given," but he nonetheless accepts the standpoint. The phenomenological standpoint he adopts, however, is not in any sense first person *singular*; nor, for that matter, is it first person *plural* either. It is rather first person as "Spirit," a so far undifferentiated subject that Fichte and Schelling had called "the Absolute" and which Kant, with some confusion, had called "*the* transcendental ego" and "consciousness in general." The identity of this subject may be in question (it is not an individual substance; it is not a soul) but its existence at the very basis of Hegel's philosophical outlook is not in question. "Truth is substance and subject as well," he wrote in the Preface(17), and he did *not* just mean that the world consists of matter and mind too. The subject is not a thing, not an ego or a determinate self but a viewpoint (the only possible viewpoint, within the tradition) such that it is *consciousness*—whether or not distinguished from the world of objects of which it is conscious—that represents the standpoint of our every philosophical move. This is, after all, the only sense to be given to the word, "phenomenology," and the only sense too to be given to the fact that from beginning to end, Hegel tells us that consciousness is the protagonist of the *Phenomenology*, realizing itself as self and then Spirit, developing itself through "the Concept" to the level of Science and (in the *Logic*) "the Idea." It is the first person standpoint gutted of all of its traditional apparatus—the individual Self and "subjectivity" and Kant's "possibility of the 'I think' accompanying all of my representations."

But it is the first person standpoint that is assumed throughout, and it is consciousness that is our subject matter, all the way. Indeed, it was the elevation of consciousness to this central role that Hegel saw as one of his primary advances over Schelling.

The adoption of the first-person standpoint is already, according to Hegel, the acknowledgment of the Absolute. It is the acceptance of what Heidegger would later call one's "being-in-the-world" as the starting point of all experience and knowledge and the first principle of philosophy. But comprehending one's being-in-the-world, as opposed to simply accepting it as a starting point, is a complex and convoluted educational experience, the "road" to absolute knowing that the text of the *Phenomenology* provides for us. Thus, in only a few pages of the Introduction, Hegel has already set us up in the Absolute. What remains, in the hundreds of pages to follow, is to unfold the various "forms of consciousness" which, ideally, add up to absolute knowing, that is, taking up the first-person standpoint from every possible perspective and comprehending the Absolute as a whole. (And if there can be no absolute knowing, and so no Absolute in this all-encompassing sense, at least the journey itself will "expand our consciousness," if to less than absolute proportions.)

Placing Hegel in the mainstream of the modern tradition and interpreting the *Phenomenology* as an exercise within the first-person standpoint has several pervasive implications for our reading and interpretation of the text. First of all, it means that, as Hegel insists in the Introduction, we ourselves are involved in the dialectic that is to follow, and it is "consciousness [i.e. our consciousness] that will provide the criterion" for what is to come," (84). We are not (as Hegel coyly suggests in the Preface) mere observers, pretending to look away as consciousness goes its own way. Second, many of the oddest features of Hegel's philosophy—most notably his all-embracing concept of *Geist*(Spirit)—make sense and achieve their plausibility only within this tradition—straining it to its ultimate limits and making reaction against it unavoidable. (This reaction came soon enough, with Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche in 19th-century Europe, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein in early 20th-century England.) And third, it is essential to see that Hegel, in rejecting the correspondence view of truth (between experience and the things themselves) was opening up the way for a more sophisticated view of truth, which begins, but by no means ends, with what we might call a developmental coherence theory. Truth, in a phrase, is consciousness coming into agreement with itself.

The Question of the Criterion

... as an investigation and examination of the reality of cognition, it would seem that it cannot take place without some presupposition which can serve as its underlying *criterion*. —*Phenomenology*

In the Introduction (80), Hegel tells us that “the *goal* is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Concept corresponds to object and object to Concept.” But the correspondence language (“Concept to object, object to Concept”) should not blind us to the fact that what Hegel is actually defending here is a *coherence* view of truth, the way our various concepts and judgments tie together, the way we comprehend our experience within the network of our self-imposed concepts and forms, the intelligibility of our concepts in the face of our actual experience, our over-all sense of total comprehension. But how could there be a problem here, you might well ask. That is, if one accepts the Kantian concept of “constitution” such that it is our concepts that “set up” the objects of our experience, then how could they fail to cohere? The answer is that they could fail in just the same way that an architect who builds a building might fail—if the plans themselves are in error, or they could fail in much the same way that the builder might fail, by not meeting the requirements of the plans. And this is what Hegel calls “contradiction,” not (usually) the opposition of logically contradictory theses but the incoherence of a form of knowledge, its inadequacy according to its own criteria.

Where does this “criterion” come from? Hegel tells us,—“consciousness will provide its own criterion” (84) and this criterion, in a word, is *coherence*. But this is too simple. First of all, it is not, for Hegel, a purely cognitive or epistemological notion; it is not, in other words, the purely logical doctrine of “internal relations” of F.H. Bradley that so infuriated Bertrand Russell. (See p. 325) For Hegel, coherence is ultimately *self-satisfaction*, the integrity of self-identity rather than the mere logical cohesion of one’s judgments. Thus, in the middle of his discussion of “Science,” he tells us that the dialectic is ultimately driven by the fact that we “always find ourselves back at the same barren ego,” and it is this sense of personal inadequacy, rather than some epistemological quandary, that provides the criterion for coherence, the standard of truth.

Second, coherence is not a question of conformity to a single stan-

dard; in fact, throughout the *Phenomenology*, it is the standard itself that changes. The idea that consciousness provides its own criterion thus lends itself to another interpretation; not only do we discover in ourselves an over-riding all-encompassing demand for coherent comprehension of our experience; we also find, for each “form of consciousness”, a specific criterion which is intrinsic to that form itself (85–87). “Concept and object” then become not a dualism of consciousness and thing-in-itself (which is exactly what Hegel rejects) but rather a form and its satisfaction of its own criterion, which may not succeed. For example,—the criterion for knowing something is knowing the thing-itself; that is the criterion for knowledge which is provided by our very idea of knowledge. But when we try to conceptualize and describe what it is to know something, *à la* Descartes or Locke or Hume or Kant, we find that our description of the form of consciousness isn’t adequate to capture what is so obviously essential to it. (Remember that a “form of consciousness” includes the attempt to articulate it as well as the form of experience itself). Another example—we tend to think of relationships with other people as meetings of two individuals, with common interests and reciprocal desires, including the desire for approval. But what we really *want* out of a relationship (whether lovers or friends) may well be something else, which that set of desires and expectations makes impossible. Again, what we *think* about our consciousness and what consciousness is actually doing are askew. And one more example—a man thinks of his society and his government in particular as something separate from himself, even *opposed* to him; but as he struggles for what he calls his “freedom” he finds that he feels increasingly “alienated” from society, feels lonely and isolated and dissatisfied with himself. Here Hegel again would say that something is wrong with the form of consciousness itself, that the ideal form of consciousness would not leave us with that sense of dissatisfaction, would not set up an ideal for itself which at the same time would make us unhappy. “Thus consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands; it spoils its own limited satisfaction”(80).

Each form of consciousness provides its own “criterion,” its own ideals, its own desires and intentions. And it is according to this criterion, these ideals and desires and intentions, that a form of consciousness is shown to be inadequate, *not* according to some “outside” standard. An argument against democracy, for instance, could not consist of the fact that it fails to recognize the divine right of kings; what would count as an argument might be an objection that, by its own standard of equal representation and power for each individual,

democracy fails, because the majority inevitably imposes its opinions on minorities. An argument against a certain conception of knowledge (what Hegel calls "sense-certainty"), which claims to know by mere intuition rather than through any effort of the understanding, cannot simply dismiss intuition as irrelevant to knowledge; what one would have to show is that this claim about knowledge, *by its own standards*, cannot make even the slightest sense of the fact that we do know—that today is Tuesday or that Tirich Mir is the tallest mountain in Pakistan. But it is an open question, at every turn, whether when "two moments [of consciousness] do not correspond to one another, one changes the form or alters the criterion," whether "consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object" or whether one must actually change the object. In fact, we virtually always find both, for "in the alteration of knowledge, the object alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a cognition of the object" (85). In other words, the form and its criterion are inseparable, and to change one is almost always to change the other. The criterion constitutes the form. In fact, however, many of the arguments in the *Phenomenology* keep one constant and change only the other—give up a criterion which is inadequate to the form, or change the form to fit a criterion which is not essentially altered. The "object" Hegel is talking about, by the way, should not be thought of as a specific physical object, but rather simply what a form of consciousness is "about"—which might be knowledge or interpersonal relations or virtue or society or abstract ideas. And, once again, the form that Hegel talks about with misleading singularity may mean *both* a way of conceiving an object *and* a way of describing that conception. But this means—if I may try not to be too troublesome—that what counts as "form," what counts as "criterion," and what counts as "the object" may in many cases be interchangeable. A theory of knowledge, for example, depends upon what we think we know, and what we think we know depends upon the conceptions we bring to our experience, including a certain view of knowledge (whether or not this is articulated as a "theory"). The idea that knowledge consists of sensory awareness of tangible particular objects, for instance, manifests itself in a way of experiencing and thinking about objects as well as in a sophisticated theory about what counts as knowledge. So too, our ethical theories depend to a large extent on what we actually do and have been taught is right or wrong, but then what we do and consider to be right and wrong quite obviously get influenced by various theories of ethics, whether particular normative principles ("never tell a lie"

or “get him before he gets you”) or highly abstract moral theories (“always act so that the maxim of your action should be willed as a law for everyone”).

The “contradictions” of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* are, first of all, contradictions *within* forms of consciousness. They are contradictions between the way a conception actually works and the theory we formulate about it, between the standard for success and the pathetic failure to reach that standard, between contradictory formulations of the same criterion or between contradictory efforts to carry out a certain program.

It is only in the study of the text itself that we will be able to identify and examine the rich variety of “contradictions” that Hegel provokes in the various “forms of consciousness” of the *Phenomenology*. But to simplify what we have just said above and Hegel’s own unnecessary double talk on the topic, one can say that, for each form of consciousness, there will be *some* internally significant inadequacy; sometimes it will be simply the fact that it has nothing to say of itself, and is therefore said to be “empty.” Sometimes it will be because it invokes a standard which it cannot possibly reach. Sometimes it will be because its conception of itself is inadequate to account for what it obviously is (as when a fascist describes his society as “true freedom” or an obviously unhappy hedonist insists that “pleasure is the only good.”) Sometimes a form will be inadequate because it leaves out too much, and sometimes a form will be inadequate because it claims too much for itself. These inadequacies are the “errors” without which we will not move toward the truth. Correcting them, accordingly, is the dialectic that moves the *Phenomenology*, as we try to get a general criterion for consciousness that is adequate to itself.

The progression of forms in the *Phenomenology* does follow one formal requirement, which Hegel calls “determinate negation” (79). What this means is that every inadequate form, every “error,” suggests another form, a way to correct or get around the problems it poses. “Determinate negation” means that the alternative is distinctive; for example, a person who rejects the life of pleasure tends (according to Hegel) to turn to a life of virtue. “Indeterminate negation” would be a simple rejection, with no particular way to go. In a particular context—choosing a dessert, for example—“not an apple” might mean “a banana”; that is determinate negation. But out of all context, “not an apple” applies to everything whatever—except apples; that is indeterminate negation. (“Well, how about the number 3, then?”) But since all of Hegel’s forms are discussed within a particular context, their “negation” is in every case determinate, which is not to say, strictly

entailed or in any other sense “necessary.” The most insidious case of indeterminate negation, on the other hand, is scepticism, which denies the validity of our whole system of knowledge but provides no alternative.

*Knowledge as Self-Knowledge:
The Three Voices of the Phenomenology*

Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it, this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called *experience* (*Erfahrung*). —*Phenomenology*

What makes the dialectic possible, and Hegel’s philosophy so exhilarating, is the post-Kantian recognition that the concepts through which we understand our experience contribute to the formation of our experience. Thus theories of knowledge, of human relations, of society, of virtue, are not merely theories “about” already determinate subject-matters—which either accurately describe them or do not—but they are rather the conceptual forms that make up the subject matter. Materialist theories of knowledge tend to interpret the world as nothing but matter; democratic theories of government tend to encourage if not demand democratic governments; theories that view human relations as essentially conflict tend to promote conflicts. Thus the form and its theory are never wholly distinct; the “object” and consciousness are mutually supportive, mutually necessary.

Looking at philosophy in general, this all-important idealist twist defines quite clearly for us at least the opening arguments of the *Phenomenology*. “Consciousness knows *something*” Hegel tells us (86) and this something is “in itself.” But what we now know (since Kant) is that this something is “in itself only for consciousness;” in other words, it is constituted as in itself but nevertheless is not, as it seems, independent of consciousness. “From the present viewpoint” of post-Kantian idealist philosophy, therefore, “there is a reversal of consciousness itself,” which Kant called his “Copernican Revolution,” according to which we now see objects in terms of our conceptualization of them, as “something contributed by *us*.” But this means that the foundations of knowledge depend upon *self-knowledge*, and the forms of the world in fact turn out to be the forms of consciousness. In Hegel, however, these forms are not the fixed categories of the understanding (as for Kant) and so self-knowledge too turns into some-

thing else—a comprehension of the *changes* of consciousness from form to form, which Hegel calls “reason.”¹⁰

The three categories, “consciousness,” “self-consciousness,” and “reason” are, of course, the three-part structure of the *Phenomenology*. But there is a more important sense in which they also represent three different “levels” of consciousness. Consider the following mundane example: you have an emotion or a mood—you are angry at Joe or afraid of a small barking dog, or you are generally depressed. At first, your whole attention is focused on the “object” of your emotion; Joe seems hateful to you; the dog seems ferocious; the world in general seems colorless and frustrating. Then, you “catch” yourself, and become self-conscious; you become aware of the fact that you’re angry, or afraid, or depressed, and your attention now shifts to your self. (Perhaps you will even get angry at yourself for being angry and forget about Joe altogether. But recognizing that you’re depressed sometimes makes you even more depressed.) If you are “reasonable,” however, the process does not stop there; you try to understand *why* you are angry, or afraid, or depressed. You examine your feelings but you also reflect more carefully on the situation and the “object” of your emotion or mood—no longer the object “in itself” (as it seemed to you at first) but now the object—Joe, the dog, the world—as it relates to your emotion or mood. Through such examination, of course, you often *change* your emotion or mood, although the direction of that change (intensifying it, defusing it, transforming it to another passion) depends on the particular case, on you and your emotional outlook in general.

What we have just done is to present, in simple everyday terms, the three “stages” of “consciousness,” “self-consciousness,” and “reason.” Notice that, in the final reflection, all three are present at once—in fact, one cannot have the reflection without the self-consciousness, and one cannot be (truly) self-conscious of having a particular emotion unless one indeed has that emotion. On the other hand, one could be conscious without being self-conscious, and one can be self-conscious without being reasonable and reflective; and this is just what happens in the *Phenomenology*. In the early stages, we (consciousness)

10. Hegel sometimes calls this “experience,” by which he means not just the perception of individual matters of fact but the whole of our comprehension. Hegel’s original title for the *PG*, remember, was “*The Science of the Experience of Consciousness*,” (see *PG*, 88), although it is “consciousness” not “reason” or “experience” that is the subject-matter throughout most of the text. Experience is thus best conceived as the whole process of consciousness, with reason just one of its aspects. For an obscure but insightfully appreciative analysis, see Martin Heidegger’s *Hegel’s Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

are aware primarily of objects—the world before our eyes. Later (with Kant) we become self-conscious, and increasingly aware of our own role in constituting the world—whatever its content happens to be. “Self-consciousness” has little to say about the actual forms of the world, but the world nevertheless must *be* there, if no longer the focus of our attention. And finally, in the long final development of the book, we become circumspectively reflective, looking both at the objects of our knowledge and at the forms of selfhood through which we come to conceive of this knowledge, including the history of these forms, changing them as we examine them, looking at them in this way and then in that way, trying to get the total picture.

What Hegel sometimes seems to suggest—in tune with the Enlightenment thinking of his time—is that we can, ultimately, be completely transparent to ourselves, understand with divine wisdom the workings of consciousness and its motives. This, of course, would be genuine absolute knowing, complete self-knowledge which includes a total understanding of the world and the ways in which we know it. But elsewhere in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel is part of that long German tradition, from the Gothic mystics to Leibniz to Freud, who saw quite clearly the *opacity* of consciousness to itself, the impossibility of such transparency and the endlessness of reflection and self-understanding.¹¹ But whether the process can be completed or not, the essential structure will always be the same—awareness of the world (“consciousness”), then awareness of oneself being aware of the world (“self-consciousness”), and then the critical examination of oneself being aware of oneself being aware of the world. This part of the dialectic is “necessary,” at least; one cannot begin to reflect until one has a life to reflect about. Thus we “apprehend the rich and concrete abundance [of life] . . . finally to give accurate instruction and pass serious judgment upon it. From its very beginning, culture must leave room for the earnestness of life, in its concrete richness; . . . this kind of knowing and judging will still retain its appropriate place in ordinary conversation” (*Phenomenology* 4, in the Preface).

The whole process, including all three “levels” of consciousness, is what Hegel calls *experience* (*Erfahrung*). And “consciousness” too, despite its restricted denotation in the first part of the *Phenomenology*, essentially includes all three levels, not merely knowing the world, but self-knowledge and reflective reason too. The experience of consciousness is not, therefore, just simple awareness of the world, but a

11. Cf. Taylor, *Hegel*: “For Hegel there is no problem of the relation of linguistic, articulate consciousness to deeper, unreflective levels of experience, for *Geist* is complete self-clarity” (p. 569).

chorus of “voices” of consciousness with different interests and different domains. Throughout the *Phenomenology*, we will see that there are at least three such voices. First, there is the voice of a participant in each form of consciousness who is aware primarily if not solely of the content of that form. Then there is the voice of the participant who has become self-conscious, who tries to articulate not just the contents but the form itself, the theory behind it, its intentions and goals. (These two voices become confused, naturally enough, when the content of the form is already articulate, or when the content is itself Self-consciousness.) Finally, there is the philosophical voice of reason—“for us who are following the process”—that enters into the procedure at every critical point. The third voice, of course, is Hegel himself, leading us, like a good psychiatrist, from naïve awareness of the world to self-awareness to rational reflection, in order to change for the better the way we see both ourselves and the world.¹²

The Idealist Twist: Knowledge as an Activity

We can know *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them.

—Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

The idealist turn to self-consciousness and reason has a more profound and confusing consequence whose beginnings we also find in Kant. It was Kant who insisted that *we* supply the categories to give form to experience but denied that we thereby knew “the things-in-themselves.” But Kant did not, as Fichte later suggested, mention the unknowable “things-in-themselves” in error, retaining inadvertently an inessential leftover from an earlier metaphysical era. Knowledge was only half the story for Kant; faith—or more accurately, “practical reason”—was the other half. Just because all knowledge is limited to experience didn’t mean that we can have no rational beliefs (but not “knowledge”) about the things-in-themselves. All action, will, mo-

12. The interpretation of these three voices varies from commentator to commentator. James Ogilvy, for example, distinguishes; (1) the forms themselves; (2) Hegel who has gone through them already; (3) We (students) who are going through for the first time. The three voices might also be compared profitably with the three “egos” in Kant’s critical philosophy, which Sam Todes analyses as: (1) empirical ego (that knows the facts, feels depressed, remembers its childhood); (2) transcendental ego (that imposes rules on experience); (3) philosophical reflection (which discovers the presuppositions of empirical consciousness and the *a priori* forms of understanding). The first might simply be called “experience” (but not in Hegel’s all-embracing sense); the second is understanding, and the third is reason. See Samuel Todes, “Knowledge and the Ego: Kant’s Three Stages of Self-Evidence,” in R.P. Wolff (ed.), *Kant* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

reality, and religious belief are based on the things themselves, and Kant accordingly distinguished the "sensible" world of knowledge from the "intelligible" world of human action, morality, and faith. In the intelligible world, we encounter the things-in-themselves directly (which prompted Schopenhauer, in conspicuous competition with Hegel, to postulate *The Will*—writ large, like "Spirit"—as the thing-in-itself.) Now, on the one hand, this distinction reintroduces just that epistemological gap that Kant tried to close, allowing the sceptic once again to drive in his wedge. (This is the topic of the first part of Hegel's Introduction.) But, on the other hand, it put us in direct contact with the things themselves, though not as knowledge, but as *practical* matters.¹³ Kant both denied and gave in to the sceptic, leaving the status of metaphysical knowledge even more uncertain than it had been before.

In a sense, Hegel (following Fichte and Schelling) does no more than shift the terms of Kant's argument and includes within the singular realm of "consciousness" *both* what Kant called knowledge and what Kant considered our direct contact with the things-in-themselves. But what this means, is that both knowledge and action proper, as well as religious faith too, are to be understood through *self-examination*, through the interpretation of our *intentions* rather than through an inquiry into the sources and origins of knowledge. The world-in-itself—the Absolute—is not to be questioned in either endeavor, in Science or in action. The only intelligible question, therefore, is not *whether* or even *how* we know the world but *why* we supply the forms to understand it as we do. This is Fichte's view precisely. Hegel does something more, but this is where he begins. What are the *reasons* why consciousness sees things this way rather than that?

Charles Taylor has developed this view to the point where he claims that knowledge is to be understood not as a matter of inference from evidence but rather on the model of knowing one's own actions.¹⁴ This is directly opposed to the traditional epistemological model, according to which knowledge is an inference from representations which

13. The common-sense basis of Kant's model is this: it is only when we sit back and contemplate the world that the idea that we might not know anything, or that our mental representations might not correspond to the world, make any sense at all. In action, the idea of questioning the reality of the situation (as opposed to the rightness of our action) is literally absurd. I can stare at a soccer ball and wonder if it really exists; but if I kick it, like Dr. Johnson, can I wonder anything of the sort? Thus Fichte, following through, declares that we make reality real to ourselves only through our activity, not through knowledge alone. Several recent authors have pursued an interpretation of Kant's epistemology as an "alienated" theory of knowledge, with just this paradigm of detached contemplation in mind.

14. In seminars at the University of Texas, March 1980. But see his *Hegel*, esp. pp. 214–21, on the "self-authenticating dialectic."

are caused “in us” by the “external world.” The alternative which Taylor proposes is “non-observational knowledge” (G.E.M. Anscombe’s term), which is not known through indices or evidence; in an important sense, one “just knows.” But what one “knows” requires a description, an interpretation, an articulation of an intention, a goal, an “essence” of action. One can misunderstand one’s own action. One can misdescribe or misconceive of an action. What one cannot do is fail to know it at all, as the sceptic claims we can fail to have any knowledge at all. Even the most extreme Freudian, who postulates unknown motives at the base of every action and desire, could not claim, as the sceptic does, that we cannot understand our actions *at all*. At least the “superficial” descriptions are always available to us, and usually these prove to be more than sufficient.

The way we understand our actions, of course, transform the act itself in a rather direct way; here too we can see how the self-knowledge model has its advantages over the epistemological model, and how it helps us to understand what Hegel means when he says a change in knowledge means a change in the object too. If one changes one’s mind about what one is doing, what one is doing changes too; and if one has a confused conception about what to do, what one actually does will be similarly confused. Thus Hegel tells us that to move from confusion to clarity is to transform both consciousness and its object as well. And the more we know about our action, the more *free* it is. Freedom, on this analysis, is just another word for nothing left to *know*.

Knowledge, in the epistemological tradition, seems curiously detached, a barely embodied consciousness—tied mysteriously to a set of sense organs—trying to find out about the world outside of itself. But on the model of knowledge as self-knowledge, which brings together the practical and the theoretical aspects of our conscious activity, it is clear how it is that our reflections and our efforts to change our intentions follow a practical rule and require as more than a matter of merely theoretical elegance a thoroughness, a coherence, a practicality that is essential to right action and good living, as well as to “Science.” It is the *practical* exigencies of life that keep us going, force us to change, move the dialectic; the “contradictions” in the *Phenomenology*, more often than not, turn out to be practical dilemmas rather than theoretical inconsistencies. Every form of consciousness, whether implicitly or explicitly, is not a belief about “the external world”; it is rather, in Wittgenstein’s now popular phrase, *a form of life*.

It is in the discussion of knowledge that this thesis is most striking, most innovative, and most at odds with Kant’s limited view of knowledge. Every claim to knowledge, as well as every theory of knowledge,

includes the conscious activity of setting up criteria for adequacy, for evidence, for interpretation. Philosophical reflection, in turn, involves making these criteria explicit, challenging them, and seeing if, in fact, they provide us with an adequate (that is, *practical*) conception of our own experience. This practical demand throws a very different light on Hegel's much abused celebration of contradiction—in Kant's antinomies, for example: it is often supposed that Hegel champions contradictions "in the world," and this is quite rightly objected to as a matter of intellectual perversity. But the contradictions Hegel derives in the *Phenomenology* are for the most part *practical*: they are dilemmas of self-consciousness and practical reason rather than mutually exclusive propositions. Hegel recognizes the inevitability of such dilemmas, but he also insists that they are the results of a too-restricted perspective or inadequate conceptions of oneself. Contradictions are significant for Hegel because they *demand* resolution. One can live with Zeno's paradoxes; one cannot live with an incoherent conception of self that makes one's actions pointless.¹⁵

To know is also to be engaged in an activity. This thesis, which so influenced Dewey and the pragmatists in our own century, is at the heart of Hegel, and it is the main point of the Introduction and, ultimately, much of the *Phenomenology*. It is a thesis that is firmly based in Kant's philosophy, but with twists that Kant would never have recognized, much less approved of. It is an activity that is inextricably linked with other practical activities, comprehending oneself and one's place in the world. With that in mind, the traditional epistemological picture of detached consciousness trying to reach out or infer to a world "outside" is not only philosophically inadequate because it leads to scepticism; it is a practical absurdity. Knowing is a part of living and doing, and to think of it otherwise is to render curiously effete or irrelevant the conceptual activities without which we would not be conscious at all.

The experience of itself which consciousness goes through can, in accordance with its Concept, comprehend nothing less than the entire system of consciousness, or the entire realm of the truth of Spirit. For this reason, the moments of this truth are exhibited in their own proper determinateness, viz. as being not abstract moments, but as they are for consciousness, or as consciousness itself stands forth in its relation to them. Thus the moments of the whole are *patterns of consciousness*. In pressing forward to its true existence, consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being

15. The most dramatic example of an incoherent conception of self in the *PG* is the Antigone story, which Hegel presents as a classic illustration of divided loyalties—schizoid identity—in the making of tragedy. (*PG*, 464).

burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of "other," at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself.¹⁶

16. Notice that here, as elsewhere, Hegel takes absolute knowledge to be the moment when "consciousness itself grasps this its own essence." It is not clear, however, whether it is this simple fact of cosmic self-recognition that constitutes absolute knowing or whether it is the detailed comprehension of the *contents* of consciousness that is required as well. The first interpretation makes absolute knowing little more than recognition of the Absolute; the latter provides a much stronger conception of the path to absolute knowledge without which the greater part of the *PG* would not be necessary.

Chapter Seven

Consciousness and the Dialectic: Hegel's Theory of Knowledge and His Philosophy of Science (chapters 1–3, 4, 5A)

True knowledge and ordinary knowledge are different. I once saw a farmer who had been wounded by a tiger. When someone said that a tiger was hurting people, everyone was startled. But the farmer reacted differently than the rest. Even a young boy knows that tigers can hurt people, but his is not true knowledge. It is true knowledge only if it is like the farmer's. —Ch'eng I

The best-known single chapter of the *Phenomenology*, except perhaps for the “Master-Slave” parable of chapter 4, is the first chapter on “Sense-Certainty” (*Sinnliche Gewissheit*). The least read chapter of the *Phenomenology*, on the other hand, is the first part of chapter 5, what Hegel would call his “philosophy of nature” and we would call his “philosophy of science.” But the two stand in an important relationship, and between them is a sometimes agonizing progression of positions which—though many of them cannot be appreciated without some reference to the now archaic scientific views of the time—show Hegel to be anticipating some of the more radical moves in very recent philosophy.

In this long chapter, I want to go through this progression of forms, from sense-certainty, perception, and “force and understanding” into the first few pages of chapter 4, where Hegel's theory takes a decisively pragmatic turn, and through the first part of chapter 5, where Hegel borrows heavily from Schelling and develops an Idealist philosophy of nature, in which laws are dictated not *to* but *by* consciousness, as Kant had declared in his *Prolegomena* (“The understanding does not derive its laws (a priori) from, but prescribes them to, na-

ture.”).¹ It was a project already begun by Kant in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* of 1786, but Hegel’s account, like Schelling’s, far more resembles Aristotle than Newton. The model is biology rather than physics, and more concerned with “life” and teleology than simple cause and effect.

All of these chapters are straightforwardly about *knowledge*. They are, in the broad sense, epistemological theories about what it is to know the world and what it is that is known. The first three chapters are collectively entitled “consciousness,” by which Hegel does *not* mean “the mind” but rather more like “knowing something.” The emphasis in all three chapters is not on the knowing, however, but rather on the “something,” on *what* it is that one supposedly knows. If we were to choose a single book for comparison it would have to be Plato’s *Theaetetus*, whose declared purpose is to define knowledge. Like Plato, Hegel’s whole purpose is to demonstrate the unimportance of particular things and the essential role of *universals* for all knowledge.² These three chapters take us from “natural consciousness” or the view that the objects of knowledge are simply “given” to our senses with no effort on our part, to the Kantian position that our knowledge consists of the contributions we make through “understanding” and the imposition of a priori concepts (“unconditioned universals”) to our experience. What is notably missing from these three chapters is any discussion of scepticism, which has been put to the side in the Introduction. The breakdown of “natural consciousness” in “Sense-Certainty” is not by way of “indeterminate” doubt but by way of “determinate” dissatisfaction with common-sense certainty and the need to re-interpret what it is that we know. But we surely do know *something*. The sceptical doubt—whether we know anything at all—is gone from view altogether; it is a manifest absurdity that does not even deserve a place in the dialectic.

The progression of the first five chapters is emphatically *not* chronological or in any sense a report on the recent history of epistemology, despite the fact that such authors as Kant, Fichte, Newton, Locke, and

1. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p. 67.

2. The general comparison between Hegel’s epistemological explorations and the ontology of Plato is worked out by Stanley Rosen in his *G.W.F. Hegel*, esp. ch. 4, pp. 64–88. The central purpose of the *Theaetetus* is to define knowledge, but the conclusion is largely negative, which leads Cornford and other commentators to say that the unspoken purpose of the dialogue is to show that knowledge is impossible without universals, or what Plato calls “Forms” (F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935)). The argument against the immediacy of sensation in “Sense-Certainty” is certainly from the *Theaetetus*, and so is the argument of “the inverted world” at the end of chapter 3. The positive outcome of these chapters, however, might be compared with the *Theaetetus*’ sister-dialogue, *Sophist*, in which Plato’s theory of “negation” seems to serve as a model for Hegel’s analysis of “Perception” in chapter 2 and “force” in chapter 3.

Leibniz are very much in evidence. First of all, scepticism plays no role in the story, which surely it must in any account of the origins of Kant's philosophy. Second, the implicit references in these chapters just as often concern the worries of the ancients, Plato and Aristotle in particular,³ as the epistemological concerns of the moderns. But it is, in any case, not just history but philosophy, in which we follow Hegel *working* our way through various philosophical positions, concerning ourselves with ideas, not their authors. The point is to appreciate a certain line of theorizing, to see what each position offers and to see what is wrong (or rather, less than wholly adequate) about it. And the first position quite "naturally," is that of "natural consciousness" or what we would call "naïve realism"—the view that the objects of knowledge are simply "out there" in the world, and we need only open our eyes and apprehend them. The problems with this position are the beginning of every introductory philosophy class, but what is novel is what Hegel does once he has rejected this common-sense position. This will be our first opportunity to examine a progression of the dialectic in the actual "movement of consciousness" itself and this will be the place, accordingly, to formulate some preliminary hypothesis about the sense in which such transitions are "necessary" and "inherent in the process" and in what sense a new form is "more adequate" than the form it replaces.

a. Sense-Certainty: Hegel's Revenge (on Russell)

All our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation. —B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*

The *Phenomenology* begins with the form of consciousness Hegel calls "sense-certainty," our immediate sensory contact with objects, mere acquaintance without any apprehension whatever. The "certainty" of sense-certainty is not the certainty of a philosopher sure of his or her arguments; it is the naïve certainty of a novice who has not yet even thought about the question, "What do we know and how do we know

3. It would be equally absurd, however, to interpret Hegel as an atavistic ontologist, returning to ancient philosophers for either his problems or the answers to them. The turn of the 19th century was rich in both new formulations of the problems and novel answers. To give Plato and Aristotle a greater place in the first part of the *PG* than empiricism and Kant is surely unfair to Hegel's own keen sense of modernity and "the spirit of the times." Cf. Rosen, *G.W.F. Hegel*, and Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: Dover, 1955).

it?" It is, in other words, the particularly unsophisticated standpoint of common sense—the average incoming college freshman—ready for his first football game and wholly unaware that, before he gets to the stadium, his philosophy instructor will convince him that the world with all its footballs may be nothing but a mere appearance.

Hegel does not talk about "common sense" in the chapter, but he has already told us many times, in both the Preface and the Introduction, that the *Phenomenology* will begin with "natural consciousness." In what sense is it "natural"? In just this sense, that it is "naïve"; it is unthinking; it takes what it sees as obvious. One might object that the idea of "natural consciousness" (along with "common sense" and "ordinary language") is nothing but a myth, a postulation of effete intellectuals concerning the naïveté of the *hoi polloi*. One might argue that common sense is in fact not so epistemologically simple-minded, that "sense-certainty" is an extreme view. And one might also object that the *Phenomenology* could in fact start with other forms, even more "naïve" and "natural," for instance, the section on "desire" in chapter 4 or the primitive, "unreflective" family life at the beginning of chapter 6. But Hegel begins, and we will begin with him, with the supposition that there is a common view of knowledge as simple receptivity, "immediate apprehension" of an object which is simply *given* to us.

Sense-certainty is not just unsophisticated common sense, however. Realism—the view that the world is just "there," a presence which is given to us, has been defended by some extremely sophisticated philosophers, including G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, J.L. Austin in *Sense and Sensibilia*, Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, and by American philosophers Roy Wood Sellars, George Santayana, Arthur Lovejoy, and others in their *Essays in Critical Realism* (1920). They were by no means "naïve," but they nonetheless defended the kind of claim Hegel attacks in "Sense-Certainty." But even among the realists there is some disagreement about what it is that is "given" to us. For the "naïve" realist, it is the "furniture of the world," that is, trees, tables, mountains, molehills, houses, dogs, cockroaches, toys, sports cars, people, stars, and daily newspapers. For the more sophisticated "critical" realist, we are not given objects *simpliciter*, but rather objects from a perspective, partial sensory facts which need interpretation and synthesis. More limited still are the sensory "data" given to us according to the classical empiricists and Kant, who argued that what we immediately receive are just sensations—Kant's "manifold of intuition," Hume's "impressions," Locke's "sensations." Such restricted views are emphatically *not* "idealist" rather than "realist"; idealism (as in

Berkeley) adds to this view of sensations as “the given” the additional claim that there are no “objects” outside of us which are the physical cause or the basis of these sensations, that the objects of our experience are “ideas.” But what is obvious in Locke, in Hume and in Kant is that they all subscribe to *causal* theories of knowledge and accept the idea of objects “outside” of us, even if, as in Hume, we cannot prove their existence and even if, as in Kant, the object “in itself” is nothing but an “unknown x,” beyond the limits of knowledge.⁴ A view falls under the rubric “Sense-Certainty” for Hegel if it accepts the idea that something—some “object”—is *immediately given* to consciousness, without any contribution from the understanding.

“Sense-Certainty” cuts across the categories “realism” and “idealism” and embraces a broad spectrum of philosophical positions—including the entire mainstream of British epistemology from John Locke to Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer—as well as the “naïve” certainty of an introductory philosophy student who has not yet begun to think philosophically.⁵ What these positions share is their belief that *something particular is given to us immediately through the senses as the foundation of our knowledge of the world*. The point of Hegel’s attack is to establish once and for all right at the very beginning the importance of thought and language even to basic perception. Nothing is simply “given,” according to Hegel. For Kant, the manifold of intuition was given, but we provided the concepts of understanding which are necessary for intuition to be knowledge. Fichte and Schelling both disagreed and claimed to make Kant’s philosophy consistent by eliminating the passive reception of sensations, thus eliminating the object (noumenon) which *causes* us to have these sensations. In the Preface of his *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes:

The critical philosophy has indeed turned metaphysics into logic, but—as already mentioned—like the later idealism it shied at the object, and gave to logical determinations an essentially subjective signification; thus both the critical philosophy and the later idealism

4. Kant has a particularly ambiguous view of the “object,” analogous with his equivocal treatment of Truth, criticized by Hegel in the Introduction. On the one hand, the only object is the object as we know it; synthesized from the manifold of intuition; on the other hand, there is the object as *cause* of the manifold of intuition. Fichte, accordingly, sees the need to choose between these contradictory positions and gives up the idea of objects as causes. Hume is also equivocal about the idea of objects as external causes, however; he can’t make sense of it, but his theory sometimes requires it.

5. It is important to keep this spectrum of positions in mind. Hegel is demonstrably arguing against all of them. In “Sense-Certainty,” Hegel wants to refute the idea that objects are simply “given” to us, whether this view is common-sense or technical philosophy, and whether the “givens” in question are the objects of the world which we see “outside of us” or the “sense data” of modern empiricism.

remained saddled with the Object they shunned, and for Kant a “thing-in-itself, for Fichte an abiding “resistance principle” was left over as an unconquerable other.”⁶

It is the point of “Sense-Certainty” to eliminate this “other,” to campaign against the whole pre-Kantian epistemological tradition and Kant too, who still assumed in some sense that something had to be given in consciousness as a foundation for knowledge. This meant in turn that there had to be something other than consciousness to do the giving.⁷

One more target of “Sense-Certainty” deserves mention before we move on to the presentation and argument itself; not only Fichte and Schelling but Jacobi and an enormous number of Romantics were of the opinion that one could gain knowledge of the Absolute not through “the Concept” (that is, by way of articulation and argument) but by immediate intuition. Hegel attacks this view in the Preface, but “Sense-Certainty” provides a more specific argument: one cannot gain knowledge without concepts and without a context defined by concepts. (The argument is repeated once again, under the guise of ancient sun-worship, in chapter 7, but the idea is the same. Religious knowledge is not just “seeing the light;” it requires thinking about it too).

Sense-certainty is the view that knowledge is “immediate”—that is, *un-mediated* by concepts; it is the view that we can gain knowledge by *ap*-prehending (*auffassen*) an object without *com*-prehending (*begreifen*) it through the concepts of the understanding (90). It is important to stress that this is a *view* of knowledge rather than an actual form of consciousness in the sense that we will encounter later, that is, a realizable mode of living, a set of concepts which in fact structure our daily experience. It is the common-sense view of knowledge, not the content of everyday cognition. This results in a certain peculiarity, which is that “Sense-Certainty,” in so far as it can and does articulate a position, is not sense-certainty, which would be wholly inarticulate. The claim, of course, is that ordinary knowing is certain in just this sense, but Hegel will argue that there cannot be any such mode of

6. *Science of Logic*, Preface.

7. It is particularly important to stress again that Hegel is not arguing against any particular philosopher, but rather this set of claims, insofar as it enters into any philosophy. Thus the argument of chapter 1 constitutes an argument against Kant’s notion of passive sensation, but not against his theory of understanding, which will be picked up in chapter 3. It is an argument against the first premise of Locke’s empiricism, but it is not an argument against Locke’s views of substance, which will be picked up in chapter 2. And though there are aspects of the argument that might apply to Fichte, his philosophy does not really appear until chapters 4 and 5.

knowing at all. If there is a form of consciousness of any kind, it is defined by its concepts and therefore articulate, so sense-certainty is ruled out of existence from the start. But this is a key claim to be demonstrated, not just asserted.

The primary proponent of "sense-certainty" in our century is Bertrand Russell, who, in addition to fitting Hegel's characterization of this position in an almost uncanny way, also provides a deserving foil for Hegel's arguments—given his most unfair treatment of Hegel in his *History of Western Philosophy* in which he accuses him of thinking that "only minds and mental events exist."⁸ In his autobiographical reflections, too, Russell confuses Hegel with F.H. Bradley and seems to miss the point of Hegel's argument, which is so effectively directed against him.

In Russell's admirably clear defense of sense-certainty, objects are given to us, but they are given to us *through* "sense data," which are the objects of immediate knowledge. They are the immediate objects of our *acquaintance*;

We shall say that we have *acquaintance* with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of (abstract) truths.⁹

The objects of our immediate acquaintance are what he calls "sense-data," literally, the "given" in sense,

which make up the appearance of the table—its color, shape, hardness, smoothness, etc; all these things of which I am immediately conscious when I am seeing and touching my table.¹⁰

Knowing truths *about* the table may require inferences and the synthesis of this varied information, but,

so far as concerns the knowledge of the color itself . . . I know the color completely and perfectly when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible. Thus the sense data which make up the appearance of my table are things with which I have acquaintance, things immediately known to me just as they are.¹¹

It is this position, and others akin to it, that are represented and attacked in "Sense-Certainty." The crucial phrase for the attack, in Russell's account, is that "I know the color completely and perfectly when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically

8. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, ch. 16.

9. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London, 1912), p. 46.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

possible." This is "certainty" of one's "sense," indeed, and the target of Hegel's attack will be precisely this supposed impossibility of "further knowledge";

... sense-certainty ... appears to be the *richest* kind of knowledge ... the *truest* knowledge ... [it] has the object before it in its perfect entirety. But ... this very *certainty* proves itself to be the most abstract and poorest *truth*. (*Phenomenology*, 91)

Whether or not Russell ever read his Hegel, it is almost as if *per impossible*, Hegel knew his Russell. The theory of knowledge of "Sense-Certainty" has an ontological correlate: it is also a theory about the nature of reality, namely, that what are most real are particular objects.

... the object *is*: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not; and it remains even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there. (*Phenomenology*, 93)

The ontological correlate becomes problematic for the empiricist, for it is unclear whether it is particular physical objects "outside of us" or particular sensory data that are to be given this status. Moreover, it is not clear what it would be for a sensation to exist "whether it is known or not," since there is at least one powerful line of argument [Wittgenstein *et al.*] to the effect that to have a sensation *is* to know of its existence. But whether the particular objects are physical or mental, Hegel's ontological point against sense-certainty will be that particulars are *not* most real, that all particulars, mountains as well as sensations, are transient, and what is real—that is—what endures, is the concept. Notice that Hegel has adopted an ancient conception of "real" that very much conflicts with the dialectical spirit of his philosophy; namely, reality is that which is timeless and endures. But we shall find out that concepts don't endure either, for the basic lesson of the *Phenomenology* is that our conceptions of our experience (including our theories of knowledge) and the reality that we experience are inseparably one, and the vicissitudes of one are inevitably manifested in the other.¹²

12. Ironically, this was a lesson well-learned by Hegel's posthumous nemesis, Søren Kierkegaard: "Concepts, like individuals, have their histories and are just as incapable of withstanding the ravages of time as are individuals" (*The Concept of Irony*, trans. L.M. Chapel (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), p. 47). Hegel, however, resisted this, and in the *Logic* he is quite explicit that concepts (and the Concept) do *not* change, and it is because they do not change that they—not particulars—deserve the title "most real." Hegel's way of putting this point in the *PG* is rather amusing; Even animals are not shut out from this wisdom but, on the contrary, show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into it; for they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up. (109)

Sense-Certainty, however, cannot be considered a world-view, a way of conceiving of reality and knowledge as such; it is just a theory, not a possible way of seeing things (which is why it is wholly inadequate as a theory). This is not to say, however, that there could not be a consciousness something like what is described in "Sense-Certainty." One might imagine a radical phenomenologist trying to "reduce" all experience to raw sensory givens, perhaps through an enormous dose of psychedelic drugs. But then one would have to say to this phenomenologist, after he has returned not to but from his senses, that he did not thereby come to *know* anything at all. He had not gotten closer to but farther from his experience; indeed, in any cognitive sense, he had obliterated his *experience* altogether, for according to Hegel, as well as Kant, nothing prior to conceptualization even deserves the name.

There is a singularly spectacular literary example of sense-certainty, the protagonist Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*. He does not even see, much less comprehend, most of what goes on around him. Human behavior is, to him, a flat facade of performances, without significance, devoid of interpretation. The old lizard-like Salamano viciously beats his mangy yelping dog, the pimp Raymond brutalizes his Arab girlfriend, her brother sets out to kill him, and Meursault looks on as if he were watching a dull movie. It is all simply given to him, as the facts of his experience. He does not try to understand; he does not think that there is anything to understand, and Camus, in a retrospective interpretation of his own novel, declares Meursault a "hero of the truth" precisely because he does not try to "make" any more of his experience than the pure sensory given of the sun, the smell of brine on his pillow, the glare of a knife-blade stinging his eyeballs. But even so, Meursault destroys his own pretensions because, of necessity, he is also the narrator of the book, and so must *describe* his experiences. The descriptions are brilliantly minimal (*à la* Hemingway) but nevertheless descriptions. *There are no uninterpreted experiences*, is the Kantian-Hegelian conclusion; sense certainty is not only an inadequate form of consciousness; it could not possibly be a form of consciousness at all.¹³

There is one defense of sense-certainty that has such overwhelming plausibility that it tends to blind us to further arguments. Namely,

13. An American example of this sense-certain consciousness would be Benji in Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*. Even more than Meursault, Benji does not distinguish memories from perceptions, the merely immediate from the significant. But even he, like Meursault, inevitably imposes his (rather bizarre) conceptualizations on his experience, and so fails to fall into pure sense-certainty. (Cf. my "L'Étranger and the Truth," *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 2, no. 1, Oct. 1978).

it is only in direct apprehension of an object that one *really* experiences it; a description picks out certain features and neglects all the others, but acquaintance presents us with the "object in its entirety" (91). Thus "a picture is worth a thousand words" but *being there* is worth a thousand pictures. There is all the difference in the world between actually meeting someone and having him described to you, even by a novelist whose descriptions exactly capture the 'essence' of the person. There is all the difference in experience (as well as cost) between spending a week in Paris and just reading about it in a brochure, and it is not just an embarrassment of grammar that "carnal knowledge" has often been considered the "richest . . . truest" form of personal knowledge through "acquaintance" of a particularly intimate variety. No number of facts and descriptions can take its place. Thus Russell argued against the Hegelians that their world was "thin and logical" while his was rich and sensuous; he thought that they were wholly caught up in descriptions, while he was concerned with our immediate contact with the wealthy array of sensations.

Who could deny that description without acquaintance is an impoverished sort of knowledge? Who would not abuse a philosopher (as Hegel abused Schelling) who sought life in concepts instead of confrontations? But there is, Hegel is arguing, a certain fraud being perpetrated upon us here. Descriptions detached from acquaintance may indeed be impoverished and, in any case, not "the object in its perfect entirety." But it does not follow that acquaintance itself is *mere* acquaintance, devoid of concepts and prior to comprehension. Indeed, acquaintance without comprehension, as in our radical phenomenologist above, is nothing at all. One does not have a battle experience by being in the middle of a battle if one does not know that there is a battle going on; thus Stendhal's Fabrizio, mucking through the mud at Waterloo with a few stray bullets whizzing over his head, wonders despairingly if there is a battle going on, and if so whether he is missing it.¹⁴ One has not yet met the artist if one merely happens to bump into him unknowingly at an exhibition. Acquaintance is not enough; knowledge always involves interpretation and cognition. Hegel's argument goes one step further; there is no "given" element in experience prior to all interpretation. There are no foundations to knowledge; "There are no facts, only interpretations," is the thesis here, expressed succinctly by Nietzsche three-quarters of a century later.¹⁵

14. Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma* (*Chartreuse de Parme*), ch. 2.

15. Neither Hegel nor Nietzsche is denying that we have sensory experience, but they are vastly weakening the concept of the given such that, whatever we passively receive through our senses, it counts for virtually nothing at all until it is processed by

In the chapter "Sense-Certainty", the three voices of the *Phenomenology* are discernible, though they are not clearly distinguished. There is the defender of sense-certainty as a theory of knowledge—Bertrand Russell, let us say (in order to provide the most competent defense counsel). Then there is our prosecutor Hegel, who is speaking "for us" and is out to show how hopeless a view sense-certainty is. And then there is a third voice, barely articulate, which is the hypothetical voice of a consciousness which actually does experience the world as sense-certainty, in direct confrontation with objects which it refuses to describe to us or, for that matter, to itself (for this would break the "immediacy" of sense-certainty). The third voice, by the very nature of the case, is limited to mere indexicals, such as "this," and the philosophical equivalent of a grunt—inarticulate pointing.¹⁶ This gives the chapter a certain oddness, namely, that consciousness *cannot* describe itself. The theory thus postulates that consciousness *refuses* (for the same reason) to describe its contents, and this means that Hegel, pursuing sense-certainty only to find that "it" will not defend itself, must have us "take up its position ourselves" in order to refute it.

Now this is a move that has either been ignored or neglected by a large number of commentators, from Feuerbach in the last century to Löwith and Taylor only recently.¹⁷ It is argued that Hegel's attack on sense-certainty is essentially based on the fact that sense-certainty cannot or will not *say* anything, and knowledge requires something to be *said*.¹⁸ But if this were Hegel's argument (and this is about all that

the understanding. For Nietzsche, the wide variety of possible interpretations yields an equally wide variety of experiences. Like Quine in this century, Nietzsche holds that our experience is "underdetermined" by our sensory "data." Hegel, however, resists this conclusion; indeed, he sometimes seems to suggest that given vastly different sensory inputs, the universality of our concepts would nevertheless yield similar experiences of the same world; in other words, our experience is overdetermined by our concepts. But in these authors, the attack on "the given" is an attack on the idea that uninterpreted sensations or intuitions can be the unquestionable basis of our knowledge. The strongest version of "the given" and sense-certainty, on this reading, is the Jacobian intuitionist claim that we can get an intuitive understanding of the Absolute itself, prior to any interpretation or conceptualization. (I am indebted to Bill de Vries for this point, and for his insightful reading of this chapter.)

16. Hegel's word is "*meinen*," to "mean" as in "I *mean* this one."

17. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. M.H. Vogel (Indianapolis; Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); Karl Löwith, "Mediation and Immediacy in Hegel, Marx and Feuerbach," trans. K.R. Dove, in Steinkraus (ed.), *New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy* (New York; Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, esp. p. 141f.; An excellent discussion and refutation of the Feuerbach and Löwith arguments—which we shall discuss shortly—is Martin De Nys, "Sense Certainty and Universality: Hegel's Entrance into the PG," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 1978). I once made this error in my *From Rationalism to Existentialism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

18. Taylor: "... [Hegel] treats the ability to say as one of the criterial properties of knowing. And it is hard not to agree with him (*Hegel*, p. 141). But (1) the argument

we get in the Preface), it would be clearly ineffectual, and it would do what Hegel always insists that we must *not* do, namely, apply a criterion to a form of consciousness which is not already “internal” to it, which it does not itself accept. If sense-certainty insists that knowledge does not require description, it is not a refutation if we insist that it does. Sense-certainty can make its case, or at least make the confrontation a stalemate, by just shutting up, and this is what it does (104 and 105). (It says, in effect, “*I* know what I’m pointing to, even if I can’t express it.”)

This is not the argument. Hegel’s attack is rather based on what sense-certainty (that is, Russell’s theoretical voice) assures us must be the case, that sense-certainty (the hypothetical consciousness) is capable of identifying *particular* objects without the “mediation” of concepts (93). In other words, it is the pointing gesture, the word “this,” that is shown to be not at all what it seems. Even inarticulate pointing (whether for someone else or simply picking out an object for oneself) requires the definition of a context, the identification of the particular thing through its name, or its properties, the conception we have of it as opposed to other things both like and unlike it. Hegel’s argument, which goes through several twists and turns, is essentially the argument that even pointing and mere acquaintance require concepts as conditions of their possibility. The twists and turns are an attempt at completeness; Hegel first attacks the idea that one can pick out particular objects, then attacks the idea that one can even pick out particular objects *for consciousness* (like Russell’s “sense data”), and then, when sense-certainty objects that such arguments are an unfair at-

begs the question, as Taylor suspects but dismisses too easily—“. . . are we not violating our method, and importing ideas, information, theories from outside ordinary consciousness? Hegel clearly does not think so here” (ibid.). But the demand *to say* is indeed imported, not into “ordinary consciousness” (taken as subject-matter) but surely into the *theory* of sense-certainty. (2) There is much that is known that cannot be said, for example, knowing *how* to do something. (What can you say about your ability to ride a bicycle?) And (3) there are things that can be said of a system that it cannot say of itself, and not only in this particular case. Gödel and Russell have argued the dilemmas of self-reference at sufficient length so that we, in reading Hegel, should be extremely appreciative of the fact that the several voices of the *PG* do not all have the same capacity, and that in almost every form of consciousness, there will be the very real question about what *it* can say about itself as opposed to what we (with Hegel) can say about it. On this point in Taylor, see also Ivan Soll, “Taylor’s Hegel,” *Journal of Philosophy*, November 4, 1976. On point number 3, there is an obvious implication regarding Hegel’s “absolute” standpoint at the end of the *PG*, which attempts to talk with complete clarity about itself. According to Gödel, in particular, one thing a closed system cannot say of itself is that it is “complete.” Thus absolute knowing cannot say of itself that it is absolute. Of course, Hegel fudges on this issue by calling the Absolute “infinite”—that is, wholly self-enclosed (or open?) as well as complete—but this is word play (learned from Schelling and the poets). And if one insists on “infinity” one would have to say that it is, despite Hegel’s disclaimers in the *Logic*, a perpetually incomplete infinity, and in any case, an infinity that cannot know itself as such.

tempt to “mediate” its knowledge, Hegel attacks the idea that the experience itself (“my-knowing-something”) cannot refer to any particular either (103–107). At this point, sense-certainty decides it is better to say nothing, and Hegel “takes up” the position for himself. He then repeats the arguments again, this time not against sense-certainty so much as through phenomenology, trying to see for himself (ourselves) whether such particulars can be identified. Can *we* pick out a particular just by pointing, without invoking concepts? But the essence of the argument, in every twist and turn, is essentially the same—the impossibility of picking out particulars without concepts.

But again, what Hegel seems to say, and what almost every commentator takes him to be saying, turns a very strong argument into an elementary fallacy. As Hegel states the argument, it seems as if his objection to sense-certainty’s use of such demonstratives as “this” (and “here,” “I”, and “now” which are its “components”) is that they claim to be particulars, but are really (and can be shown to be) universals. Thus Hegel concludes again and again that “it is in fact the universal that is the truth of sense-certainty,” (*das Allgemeine ist also in der Tat das Wahre der Sinnlichen Gewissheit*) (96). (Again in 103, 107–9, and 110.) The argument, simply stated, is that we try to point out a “this” (or a “here” or a “now”) but find that we cannot distinguish one “this” from another “this,” since “this” can be used to refer to anything whatever. But this in itself is a bad argument. First of all, it does not make sufficiently clear that it is not just the impossibility of *saying* what the “this” refers to that is at stake, in which case sense-certainty can again insist that not being able to say is not the same as not knowing. Second, it lends itself to the argument advanced by Feuerbach and Löwith that what Hegel is fallaciously doing here is attacking a certain claim about the word “this” (and others like it) instead of making the point he thinks he is making about the nature of experience. Thus Feuerbach argues that “the beginning of the *Phenomenology* is nothing other than the contradiction between the word, which is general, and the object, which is always a particular. And the idea that relies only on the word will not overcome this contradiction. Just as the word is not the object, so is the being that is spoken or ideated not real being.”¹⁹ So too argues Löwith: “Actual being is a definite existence, here and now; thought and word are abstractly universal.”²⁰ Hegel does not state his argument well; his frequent muddling of “This” and “‘This’” (“Now” and “‘Now’”) betrays his own confusion.

All sensory being, Hegel tells us in the *Logic*, is particular; all thought

19. Feuerbach, p. 61, quoted by De Nys, p. 449.

20. Löwith, p. 132.

and language, even words such as “this,” are universal. Indeed he defines for us the all-important concept of a “universal” (*Allgemeine*) in this chapter, as “neither This nor That, a *not-This*, and is with equal indifference This as well as That” (96). This is not as clear as one would like, but it is a standard definition; a “universal” can be a property, a concept or a proposition; all remain identical in and can be defined independently of all particular instances or manifestations of it. Words (that is, their types, not their token occurrences) are “universals” (“dog,” for example) because they can be used to refer to any number of particulars (dogs). Proper names are the exception here, for at least in theory a proper name, e.g. “Socrates” or “Walter Winchell,” refers to one and only one particular. For Hegel and many philosophers, properties (such as *being red*) are universals, since any number of objects can have the same property (be *the same* color, red). So when Hegel tells us that “this” is a universal, either he is saying something uninteresting which has nothing whatever to do with the particularity of the object, only with words in general, or he is saying something that is false, namely, that “this,” considered as a proper name in a particular (sensory) context, does not designate a particular object (“the sensuous This that is meant cannot be reached by language” (110)²¹). Perhaps he was indeed confused by these issues, but if we are to read him generously, there is a much more powerful argument in waiting.

In fact, Hegel’s argument is extremely familiar to readers of recent Anglo-American philosophy. It is a *contextualist* argument, that the designation of particulars presupposes a context in which reference (whether by pointing, grunting, saying “this,” or providing some more elaborate phrase—e.g. “the man in the white suit”) is defined. This definition, in turn, is made possible by concepts, by some prior understanding of what *kind* of thing is being pointed to. But sense-certainty cannot, because it refuses to apply concepts, know what *kind* of thing it is pointing to and so, Hegel tells us, it can know only that “it *is*, the sheer being of it” (91). But even here, it is impossible to point to “the sheer being” of a particular thing; suppose I point over there, to *that* thing. What am I indicating?—the shoe? the pair of shoes? the fly on the toe of the shoe? the green spot on the head of the fly? your feet? the corner of the room? Or have I suddenly, with the Romantics, been struck with a vision of the Absolute? If I cannot do anything more than point, if I cannot apply concepts—even for

21. J.N. Findlay: “Wittgenstein would regard Hegel’s treatment as resting on a misunderstanding of demonstratives, which are unique linguistic instruments, and neither name nor describe” (in his “Analysis of the Text,” p. 510).

myself—then I cannot refer to anything in particular, nor can I point to *everything* (the Absolute) either. My pointing is entirely “underdetermined”.²²

The obvious comparison here is W. V. O. Quine’s well-known argument concerning the “radical indeterminability of translation,” and though the context and intention of the arguments differ, the illustration and initial point are the same; a sheer pointing gesture, Quine argues, or even a word (in a language we do not know) is insufficient to let us know whether a person is indicating a rabbit, a part of a rabbit, or a “rabbit-phase”—a rabbit in a certain state at a certain time.²³ Similar arguments can be found throughout Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, including such mathematical examples as “Continue the series ‘2,4,8 . . .’”, in which Wittgenstein immediately blocks the “obvious” answer (16) by reminding us that we have no *a priori* right to presume that we know the rule of the series. Indeed, without knowing the rule, or what Hegel would call the Concept, the “universal,” one has no idea what the next number might be, or what the series is. Knowing presupposes knowing rules, which means, using concepts, which means, knowing the universals which pick out the particulars.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between Hegel’s argument here and contemporary analytic philosophy is the resemblance of Hegel’s attack to the onslaught against Russellian sense data by Wittgenstein (who was also at one time Russell’s ally in these matters) in his so-called “Private Language Argument.” The “argument” (in fact a series of provocations that were later formed into an argument by Wittgenstein’s students) expounded the problem Hegel raised in the Introduction—the problem of how to find a *criterion* for knowledge, in this case, for the identification and re-identification of particular sensations or sense-data, “private objects” of any sort. Suppose you have a sensation, call it “S”; how would you know if another sensation is *the same*? Since no one else can share the experience, no one else could possibly help you. You appeal to memory (“Is this one like the last one?”) but you aren’t sure whether to trust yourself. You adopt a criterion, a rule for identification of “S,” but then you’re not sure whether

22. There is a confusion here that needs to be pointed out. Hegel (*PG*, 92) points out that the object, contrary to the claims of sense-certainty, cannot be “unmediated,” since it depends on my being conscious of it, and my being conscious of it depends on its being there. But notice that this only makes clear sense if the “object” in question is somehow sense-dependent; moreover, Hegel has shifted the meaning of “mediation” from “conceptualized” to “independent.” This should be a warning of what is to come. Elsewhere in this chapter, the same word means “individuated,” “separated,” and “divided up” (96).

23. Quine, *Word and Object*, ch. 4.

you've applied or remembered the criterion correctly. In short, Wittgenstein concludes, there can be no knowledge of such "private objects" because there is no sense in which one could ever be proved to be wrong, and if one cannot be wrong, so his argument goes, one cannot be said to be right either.

Hegel's argument is much the same, though what he says applies not only to "private" objects but to any objects at all, so long as they are supposedly known "immediately," by inarticulate acquaintance. His notion of the criterion is much abbreviated, since providing a *rule* for identification would already be a breach of sense-certainty. But the argument itself follows much the same logic; one thinks one knows a particular, but one cannot identify it. One labels it "This" but then has no way of keeping track of what "This" refers to. And this means that one does not know anything at all, for if one doesn't *mean* anything in particular, one cannot be wrong, or right about it either.

This argument against the possibility of identifying particulars has nothing to do with the demand that one must be able to *say* what it is one knows or with the peculiarity of the indexical demonstrative words ("this," "here," and "now").²⁴ It has to do with the use of universals at the very basis of experience, as a necessary condition for our being able to pick out particular objects. It has nothing to do, as Taylor says, with "having to say something just to get started," nor is it Quentin Lauer's insistence that "a thought that cannot be expressed is an empty thought."²⁵

Russell, in the development of his "logical atomism," builds the entire edifice of human knowledge on a group of "atomic facts," which are mirrored (truly or falsely) by "atomic propositions." The atomic facts are sense data; the atomic propositions are unembellished descriptions of the sense data, such as "red patch here now." It is slightly more than a "this," and Hegel would insist that the word "red" here is already something more than sense-certainty will allow. (As the name of a property it is clearly a "universal", and so too is the property.) But Hegel's strategy is obvious, and Russell fits the claims of sense-certainty far better than any proponent of empiricism Hegel could have known. Hegel takes a piece of this claim, the "now" and asks,

24. One might add that Hegel does take for granted the converse of "one must say if one knows," namely, "one must be able to say if one knows." Hegel, like Kant, assumes that applying certain concepts and using certain words are one and the same, that the latter "expresses" the former (though the former takes place prior to and often without the latter too). See, for example, the preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic*, p. 31f.

25. *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York; Fordham Univ. Press, 1976), p. 44.

"What is Now?", let us answer, e.g. "Now is Night." In order to test the truth of sense-certainty a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving it. If *now*, *this noon*, we look again at the written truth we shall have to say that it has become stale. (*Phenomenology*, 95)

In other words, it is false. What Hegel is *not* arguing here is that truth must be said, much less written down. He is insisting that a truth, *if* said and written down, must be true "timelessly," or, at least, not just for the moment. Philosophers more sophisticated than Hegel have devised techniques for answering this requirement, for example, Quine's "eternal sentences" in which the "now" must be replaced by an exact specification of the time and all indexicals replaced by definite descriptions. But the point is clear; the word "now" cannot be specified without appealing to a conceptual apparatus of enormous complexity, namely, our entire system of time and record keeping. But without that, "now" doesn't refer at all, since no sooner do I say "now" than the instant has passed, and it is no longer "now" (106).

The argument is again familiar, and philosophers have suggested some enormously complicated and outrageous suggestions to try to answer Hegel's query, from introducing the notion of the "specious present" to the suggestion that time is "unreal" (argued by some of Hegel's British followers, notably McTaggart²⁶). But Hegel's aim is simply to show that the word "now" picks out a particular moment only by "mediating" experience, i.e. by invoking our whole system of time concepts. There is now *now* to be referred to; "now" is a concept, a postulation of a complex theory, and out of context, apart from this complex system of universals, the word "now" is utterly meaningless (106–7).

(1) I point out the "Now" and it is asserted to be the truth. I point it out, however, as something that *has been* . . . I set aside the first truth. (2) I now assert as the second truth that it *has been* . . . (3) But what has been, *is not*; I set aside the second truth, its *having been*, and thereby negate the negation of the "Now," and thus return to the first assertion, that the "Now" is. The "Now," and the pointing out the "Now," are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement that contains its various moments. . . . The pointing-out of the Now is thus itself the movement which expresses what the Now is in truth, viz. a result, or a plurality of Nows all taken together; and the pointing-out is the experience of learning that Now is a *universal*. (107)

26. G.E.M.E. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1901).

The “negation of the negation” here (in Hegel’s famous phrase) is not the logicians familiar (and controversial) thesis that “not(not p) = p.” It is rather (what will become a familiar move in the *Phenomenology*) a denial of particularity—first the denial of one particularity (not *Now*) and then the denial of any other particular as well (not that *Now* either). The result, couched awkwardly by Hegel as the claim that *Now* (or “Now”?) is a universal, is instead the claim that one can have no conception of particular moments without some conception of our whole conceptual apparatus for comprehending time and distinguishing one moment from another.²⁷ And vis-à-vis Russell, this means that one component of his atomic proposition, “red patch here now” does not refer to an atomic fact at all but rather presupposes the whole of our temporal-conceptual apparatus. The same argument is repeated for “Here” and *Here* (98, 104 and 108)²⁸. The property red as well as the concept “red,” we have already noted, would be considered by Hegel to be universal. (Russell, at least at one point in his career, considered properties to be particulars.) But the point has been made and made effectively; Russell’s atomic propositions do not refer to particulars; they do not refer to anything at all. Isolated propositions do not refer; *people* refer, by asserting propositions in a determinate context with the entire conceptual apparatus of the language (the Concept) behind them.²⁹

What has Hegel shown? He has *not* shown and he has not tried to show that we never know particular objects; or that knowledge is something other than the senses, “in the realm of the pure Concept.” Indeed, two points seem too obvious for him to have to state,—that our knowledge does include the knowledge of particulars and that all of our knowledge has its basis in sensory experience. He has only argued that our identification and knowledge of particulars does not precede but presupposes our knowledge of universals—our use of language and our ability to apply concepts, and that whatever the sensory basis of knowledge may be, there are no uninterpreted (un-

27. This is not to say, of course, that one must have mastered the hard concepts of astrophysics in order to know what time it is; but it is to say that one must have *some* conception of the apparatus with which we measure time even to use the word “now.” (When a barely verbal infant screams, “I want it *now*!”—is nothing presupposed?)

28. The argument is not exactly the same, since time and space are disanalogous. Hegel, like Kant, takes time to be more fundamental, and space to be derived from our intuitions and concepts of time.

29. One set of arguments I have not mentioned is Hegel’s application of the same strategy to the “I,” the knowing self that is also assumed to be reference to a particular. The paradigm example, of course, is Descartes’s *Cogito*, “I think.” Hegel argues here, but only in a preliminary way, that one cannot simply refer to one’s Self either (91, 101, 103), that “I” is *everyone* (102). This will be picked up in chapter 4 (166).

conceptualized) experiences (e.g. *sensa data*) and, even if there were, there could be no *knowledge* of them without concepts and interpretation. But does this mean that such elements might exist apart from our knowledge of them? I believe that Hegel is saying, "No," that such "elementary" objects come into existence—as some physicists now suspect their elementary particles come into existence—only because we *create* them in our analysis. And this is true not only of "sense data," which are the empiricists' postulations rather than, as they claim, the immediate objects of experience; it is also true of particular physical objects "outside of us," which are supposed by "common sense" consciousness to be there, "in themselves," independently of our perceiving them. This does not mean that there is nothing "out there"; on the contrary, we begin with the certainty—unchallenged except for the sophistry of the sceptic and his allies—that it is all "out there," if this phrase means anything at all. But the indubitable existence of the world is not yet knowledge; the nature of the world is still in question and still "indeterminate." The "presence" of the world is never in question for Hegel. But it is here *for us*, and it is present only as what we make of it, through our various "determinations" (*Bestimmungen*).³⁰

b. Sense-Certainty to Perception: The First "Dialectical" Movement

For the explanation of *sense*, the readiest method certainly is to refer to its external source—the organs of sense. But to name the organ does not help much to explain what is apprehended by it. The real distinction between sense and thought lies in this—that the essential feature of the sensible is individuality. . . . It will be shown in the *Logic* that thought (which is universal) is not a mere opposite of sense Language is the work of thought; and hence all that is expressed by language must be universal I cannot say what I merely *mean*. And the unutterable—feeling or sensation—far from being the highest truth, is the most unimportant and untrue. —Hegel, *Logic*

30. We might note one more time that this over-all thesis, that there are no "given" particulars, not even sensations, comes directly from Fichte. This is one of the main points of his *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794, which Hegel had reviewed in 1801, and the entire first third of his popular *Vocation of Man* in 1800 (which Hegel ignored but surely knew). It was Fichte who formulated the argument directly against Kant: to introduce a "given" is to introduce something caused from without experience; but this means that there are causes not constituted through the categories, which is impossible. Fichte's solution, followed by Schelling and Hegel, is to develop a different kind of account, a non-causal account, of the more passive aspects of experience. But Hegel gives Fichte no credit for this.

Sense-certainty, Hegel concludes, is a view of knowledge which does not account for knowledge; its putative content is “unutterable,” “untrue, irrational and what is merely meant” (*das Unwahre, Unvernünftige, bloss Gemeinte*) (110).³¹ What is wrong with sense-certainty is not the fact that it is concerned with sense or confident of its certainty so much as its very specific claim to the *immediacy* of knowledge of particulars. But what Hegel shows is that insofar as sense is immediate, it cannot be knowledge at all, and there is nothing to be certain about. Sense-certainty claims with confidence that it “knows particulars,” is “immediately acquainted” with objects prior to thought and concepts, but Hegel shows that this is precisely what sense certainty cannot do, namely, identify and reidentify particulars without the aid of “universals.” Thus he tells us, somewhat misleadingly, that the “truth of sense-certainty” is “the universal” (107, 109, 110, and 111). But this does not mean that from here on we will dispense with sense and cease to consider particulars as objects of knowledge. It means only that neither sense nor individual objects (including sensations) are to be considered as *given* prior to the attempt of consciousness to understand them. In answer to Pilate’s casual question, “What is truth?”, and in answer too to Heidegger’s obsessive question, “What is Being?”, Hegel’s simple answer is, “nothing in particular.”

The breakdown of sense-certainty, however, ought to be described in a special way, according to a long line of tradition, as a “*contradiction*,” not just a collapse or a display of inadequacy but an out and out inconsistency. Hegel does not do this, at least, not in the logically precise form that is often expected of him. He does, however, say that what is said to be “most true” is “untrue,” that what is supposed to give us particulars instead gives us universals, and that sense-certainty, instead of being the “richest” is instead the “poorest” form of knowledge. But none of these counts as a genuine logical contradiction. Hegel also argues a number of paradoxes, notably his controversial claim that language—which consists of universals—cannot therefore refer to particulars. (The contemporary point would be: *language* doesn’t refer; *people* use language to refer.) But this isn’t a contradiction either. One could formulate such a contradiction, perhaps, but the point would better be made that the “breakdowns” that affect the various forms of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* are hardly ever flat-out logical contradictions as such. What we get instead are difficulties of various sorts; and the difficulty with sense-certainty is that it cannot, as a theory of knowledge, do what it claims to be able to

31. Cf. the characterization in the *Logic*, sec. 20, quoted above.

do—namely, give an account of knowledge and, in particular, how we come to know particular objects.

The “form of consciousness” which follows “sense-certainty,” therefore, is another theory of knowledge, one which will hopefully correct these inadequacies and give us what sense-certainty could not give us, an adequate account of the way in which we come to know particular objects. This is “perception” (*die Wahrnehmung*), and it approaches the problem of the identification of particulars “from the other side” so to speak; it begins with what has been established by the end of chapter 1, that knowledge is “mediated” by *universals*.³² We perceive things with properties,” not a mere “This”. Perception still insists, commonsensically, that what we know are particular things. Indeed this is the criterion of “perception” as it was of “sense-certainty” (111). The question then becomes, how can we designate a particular thing if what we know immediately are its properties? Properties too are universals and, as universals, do not and cannot themselves refer to anything particular (Remember that Hegel’s characterization of a “universal” (96) takes this “indifference” to particulars as the defining feature of *die Allgemeinheit*, “universality.”)

In one sense, “Perception” also gives us a common-sense theory; knowledge consists of our perception of a thing which has properties, and it is through the properties that we come to know the thing. Insofar as “Perception” is also a common-sense view—(1) there is no one theory of knowledge that deserves to call itself “natural consciousness” or “common sense” and, (2) sense-certainty is not the only starting point for the *Phenomenology*, even within these first chapters. Common sense is an amalgam of half-digested views, and the *Phenomenology* is concerned with all of them. But it is the idea of a “thing with properties,” which is ingrained in the very subject-predicate structure of our language (“the dog is blue”), and this is what leads us to trouble in “Perception.” The properties are “universals,” that is, sharable with other things: the “thing” is a particular. We can’t conceive of (much less *per-ceive*) the thing without its properties, but properties are properties, after all, only because they are properties *of* some thing or other. And with this common-sensical starting point we find ourselves launched into one of the most complex ontological discussions to be found throughout the entire history of Western philosophy.

32. Here again we see the slippage in Hegel’s use of the key term, “mediation.” Usually, mediation involves the application of concepts, but here in “Perception” concepts have not yet entered the picture. By chapter 3, we will be able to say that knowledge of particulars is mediated by concepts, but here we are limited to noting that knowledge of particulars is *not immediate*—that is, not identifiable without first identifying something else (the cluster of properties).

From a philosophical point of view, the theory presented in "Perception" is an eclectic combination of a number of ancient and modern philosophical theories: Plato's problematic notion of the "participation" of particulars in the "Forms" (which are universals); Aristotle's invention of the concept of "substance" as "that which, while remaining the same, is capable of admitting contrary properties"; John Locke's attack on the same notion, reducing substance to the "I know not what" in which properties adhere; and the idealism of Bishop George Berkeley and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, who argued in very different ways that a particular thing is *nothing but* its properties. This is the theory of "Perception," that a particular thing is a "cluster" of properties, a "simple togetherness."

The chapter itself is an epistemological-ontological argument, between those who take properties (or "Forms") to be most real (Plato) and those who insist on the primacy of substance, without which there would be no "Forms" (Aristotle). We can rephrase our question, then—How can we identify particular objects in the cluster of properties which make it up? Or else—How can we pick out a "cluster" of properties? One is tempted to say, "Because they are all properties of *the same thing*," but this would be begging the question since it is the cluster that identifies the thing. And this is where the age-old dispute about substances becomes an issue; how do the universals give us a particular thing? Do we not need some sense of "substance"—that is, the thing itself, a "bare" particular, as the basis for the adherence of properties? Does it make sense, Locke asked, to speak about a set of properties without presuming that they are also the properties of something that is other than the properties? But does it make sense according to Locke's own "empiricist" method, Berkeley asked in turn, to speak of a "something" that by its very nature cannot be known through experience? And so we recognize the various forms of a dialectic of "Perception" that Hegel is playing off against each other: the Platonic view that what are *real* are universals (the Forms) and the Aristotelean view that what are real are individual substances; the Lockean suspicion that some notion of substance is necessary to identify particular clusters of properties (as the properties of a particular thing) and the Berkeleian idealist challenge that no such notion of substance is even intelligible.

So far, we have only given Hegel's general characterization of "universal" as "indifference" to particulars. But we have already distinguished two sorts of universals: concepts are universals, "unconditioned" universals. *Properties* are also universals, but they are, Hegel says, *conditioned* universals, that is, "conditioned" by the senses (113,

123).³³ Red is a property, a conditioned universal, “indifferent” to particulars (any number of things in the world can be *the same* shade of red) but “conditioned” by the contingent fact that we see certain wave lengths of light because our eyes are so constructed. More problematically, the shape of a thing is a property, a conditioned universal; any number of objects can share the same shape, but our knowledge of the shape of things, unlike our knowledge of their color, depends on several senses (vision and touch as well as our sense of time and motion). Thus Locke called shape a “primary” property (inherent in the object) and color a “secondary” property (inherent rather in us). Berkeley, using Locke’s own arguments against him, showed that “primary” properties might just as well be “in us” as the “secondary” properties. But both sorts of properties are conditioned universals, common to any number of particular things and conditioned by the senses (119).

The problem of “Perception” is that perception, while it seems to be a single, coherent view of objects, in fact embodies a number of contradictory views. “Perception” confidently claims to correct the inadequacies of “Sense-Certainty” in accounting for the identity of particular “things”, but in fact it “deceives” itself into believing this (116), and the chapter is therefore subtitled, oddly, “*Die Ding und die Täuschung*” (The Thing and the Deception). We have already pointed out how the chapter runs through a dispute that can be found at least twice across a two thousand-year span—in Plato and Aristotle and in Locke and Berkeley—with many variations in Medieval philosophy too. But Hegel’s own summary negotiates a three-part model which cuts across the somewhat vast differences between the ancient and Medieval ontological disputes and the modern epistemological argument. “The Thing” is:

- (a) an indifferent, passive universality, the *Also* of the many properties or rather “matters”;
- (b) negation, equally simply; or the *One*, which excludes opposite properties; and
- (c) the many *properties* themselves, the relation of the first two moments . . . singular individuality in the medium of subsistence radiating forth into plurality. (115)

There is no simple identification of these three views; the first and second clearly call up the ancient metaphysical dispute between “the One and the Many”, but they also reflect certain distinctively modern

33. “Unconditioned universals” are the subject-matter of chapter 3 of the *PG*; Hegel has mainly in mind Kant’s a priori concepts, or *categories*. A concept of a property (e.g. “red”) would still be “conditioned” by the senses, or what Kant would call an “empirical concept.”

epistemological concerns. The first view might be taken to refer to the views of some of the pre-Socratic philosophers, but many modern metaphysicians too, who believed that “the Thing” of *substance* was nothing but underlying “stuff,” in which the various sensible properties adhered. The second view certainly bears a resemblance to Locke, who believed that substance was nothing but the “negation” of the sensible properties, plus the minimal claim that these properties belong to one and the same thing, but it also clearly refers to Plato, who argues (fallaciously) in *The Republic* that if a thing has contrary attributes, it must be two things, not one. The third view might be that of Aristotle, who believed that individual substance not only underlies but animates the various attributes of a thing, but it would also seem to represent the views of Leibniz, who certainly believed that “the many properties” are the perceived properties of an individual monad, and that the monads themselves constitute a “plurality” of substances. But the third view might also include Bishop Berkeley, who argued against Locke that there is nothing but the set of properties, and that set of properties is the thing.³⁴

The three views turn on three different components of what seems to be simply common sense—that the object of knowledge is a thing with properties. But is “the Thing” something other than its properties (a bare particular)? Or merely a space-time coordinate where the “community of properties” have their meeting? Or is it literally nothing at all? And in any case, if there is any distinction at all between the thing and its properties, why cannot a thing have *contradictory* properties, white and black (in the same spot at the same time)? We (those of us who have been following Hegel) have been aware all along that this common-sense synthesis of views was self-contradictory (117), but now “Perception” becomes aware of it too (117–18).

We shall see several key forms of argument repeated in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, and perhaps one of his favorite arguments is this one: declare a form or its object to be *x*, and then show it to be *y*; then show that the *y* is really an *x* after all. This is particularly evident in these first two chapters; sense-certainty claims that the object is a bare particular, and Hegel shows us that it is “really” a universal (or at least, all we seem to get ahold of are universals). Now, “Perception” begins with the idea that the object is made up of universals, and Hegel shows us that one cannot make sense of this without beginning with the notion of a particular. The internal arguments are much the same: sense-certainty cannot distinguish particulars because it has only

34. In Hegel’s terms, Locke believed that substance, since it could not be perceived as such, is a “determinate Nothing” (113). For Berkeley, on the other hand, it is simply nothing.

universals at its disposal to do so; perception cannot distinguish particulars either, insofar as properties—as universals—are necessarily not bound to a particular. We shall see this play-off of universals and particulars, in a variety of contexts, throughout the arguments of the *Phenomenology*.

The attempt at correcting the conflict within “Perception” is, again, an eclectic conglomeration of historical moves, including Locke’s distinction of primary and secondary qualities (119) and the empiricist-Kantian view that the unity of the various properties is not to be found in “the Thing” but rather *in us*, the “responsibility of consciousness” (119–22). But *it* (“the Thing”) is distinguished by *its* properties, and so perception (in empiricism, for example), finds itself torn now not only between different views of “the Thing and its properties” but also between the view that the unity is to be found in things and the view that the unity of things is rather to be found in consciousness (122). We combine the various properties—perceived as sensations—into a unity, says Locke, but does that mean that those properties are also the properties of the Thing? Some properties are “in” things, he says, namely, “primary” properties, but “secondary” properties are not. In what sense are the properties of a thing, then, truly properties of the thing?

It is at this point that the dialectic of “the Thing and its Properties” clearly becomes the province of German philosophy, in the philosophy of Leibniz (who knew and corresponded with John Locke in England). The problem of the identity of “the Thing,” whether as substance in the world or space-time coordinates or merely a sum of properties, is resolved by an ingenious metaphysical picture according to which the substances themselves are simple *immaterial* unities, called *monads*, whose primary activity is called “Perception” (*Wahrnehmung*).³⁵ There are a plurality of such monads, but each one, Leibniz insists, is simple. What we “perceive,” however, is a “multiplicity in the unity”;³⁶ in fact, each monad perceives the entire universe within itself.³⁷ This means that Leibniz, like Locke and Berkeley, denies the existence of physical substances as such. But Leibniz (like Berkeley) also rejects the notion of physical space and time, “outside of us,” and so the identity of a thing cannot be its space-time coordinates either. Neither is Leibniz willing to settle for the simple Berkelian alternative, the idea that a thing is *nothing but* its properties; instead, Leibniz argues that a particular thing is to be identified by its *relationships* to

35. Leibniz, *Monadology*, in *The Rationalists* (New York; Doubleday, 1966), Proposition 14.

36. *Monadology*, Prop. 16.

37. *Monadology*, Prop. 62.

other things. In fact, space and time are defined in terms of these relationships too.³⁸

The problem that arises on this account is the problem that is called “the identity of indiscernibles.” Hegel discusses it, obliquely of course (124–28). On the one hand, things consist of relations (“the Thing is not just *for itself*; it is also *for another*” (123)). On the other hand, it is still a *different* thing, which has “its essential difference within its own self.” The tension now shifts from “opposition in the thing itself” (between the three views stated above) to the autonomy of the object, “for itself.” What if two things shared *all* the same properties, and stood in a precisely symmetrical relationship to each other? Would there still be two objects, or would there be but one? Common sense seems to tell us that, of course, there would still be two of them, two remarkably similar objects, but separate just the same. But matters are not so simple.

This problem of the “identity of indiscernibles” is, How could there be two objects which are *exactly* the same? Hegel calls this the “absolute difference” between them (124), that is, their difference despite the fact that they share all properties in common. But, you might suppose, if they are still *two* things, then they necessarily differ in at least one set of properties, namely, their space-time coordinates. That is, *if* one also accepts the idea that there is an “absolute” set of such coordinates, independent of the relationships between things—and this is just what Leibniz denies. In practice, perhaps, one can always find some third object which will provide a set of coordinates (“the penny to the left of the lamp,” “the star 30 degrees off the star-board”); but in theory, consider a universe containing just two objects with all the same properties, say—two red perfect spheres.³⁹ Are they distinguishable? No. Not only do they have all properties in common such as “red” and “spherical” (non-relational properties) but they also (necessarily) share symmetrically all of their relational properties. There is no such designation as “the one to the left,” since either of them can equally be “on the left.” (We are not yet introducing an implicit third factor, namely, the position of the observer; this Heisenbergian complication is far beyond the bounds of “Perception,” even though Leibniz himself insisted that God was always such an observer, as well as the creator, of the world.) Neither can we specify the distance between the two objects—say “twenty feet apart,” for what would count

38. We shall say something more about this conflict between Leibniz and Newton in our discussion of chapter 3, “Force and the Understanding.”

39. The example belongs to Ed Allaire, Freudian overtones notwithstanding. A similar case can be made for two white squares (Herbert Hochberg’s preference).

as a "foot"? Lewis Carroll's Tweedledum and Tweedledee are a playful example of the identity of indiscernibles, and so are Tom Stoppard's Rosenkranz and Guildenstern. The problem for them all is that they cannot tell one from the other, because there is no difference between them. But then, we have once again lost our common-sense starting point—that we can pick out particular objects even if they share their properties (which are, after all, universals). Leibniz himself solved this problem by invoking God, who would do nothing without a "sufficient reason,"⁴⁰ and would have no reason for duplicating; therefore there are no two monads and no two things in nature which are the same.⁴¹ But this is not good enough for Hegel. If God were not so frugal, the identity of indiscernibles would still be a problem.⁴²

Even if in fact no two things have all the same properties, identification of a thing by reference to properties alone (whether relational or non-relational) leads to yet another absurdity: namely, that a thing would not be the same if even a single property were changed, no matter how "inessential" (124). This, Hegel tells us, is the ultimate "undoing of the Thing", that is, the undoing of the theory of knowledge called "Perception" (125). Surely a thing might remain the same thing with a slight change in properties. My car with a small dent in it still remains the same car. Moreover, Hegel points out (114), a thing is also defined by the properties it does *not* have. How can this be accounted for by "Perception?" Leibniz, at this point, insists that God, at least, sees every property of a thing as essential and every proposition about a thing (including negative propositions) as necessarily true.⁴³ But for us, the theory of "Perception" raises the same problems that we found in "Sense-Certainty"; we cannot pick out particular objects. Either we have to pick out only an *exact* set of properties, and since things change some properties every moment, we could never identify *the same* thing twice (as Heraclitus commented about

40. *Monadology*, Prop. 32.

41. *Monadology*, Prop. 9.

42. Ivan Soll, in his generally insightful book on Hegel, glosses over these problems with the assurance that "a complex enough combination of universals may apply to only one thing" (*An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 103.) It is worth noting that these arguments also tell against F.H. Bradley and the British Idealists with whom Hegel is often confused in the Anglo-American literature prior to only a few years ago.

43. An awkward Leibnizian move which leads Russell, to the horror of his ontological colleagues, to introduce the notion "negative facts" to correspond to negative propositions. (He later withdrew the move.) But the same point has remained intact in Continental philosophy, particularly in the Heideggerian concept of "The Nothing" (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Mannheim (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959) and Sartre's "Nothingness" (in *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Barnes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), esp. ch. 2.)

rivers). Or, we cannot distinguish a set of properties at all without some prior conception of the thing, just as sense-certainty could not specify the thing prior to some account of its properties.

It is at this point that Kant enters the picture. Although it is by no means the problem in terms of which he defines his first *Critique*, it is nevertheless the problem which occupies him through much of the “transcendental analytic.” It is the problem he calls “the problem of synthesis.” It is precisely the problem we have grappled with throughout “Perception”—in Kant’s terms, how the manifold of intuition gets “gone through in a certain way, taken up and connected.” In other words, how can a variety of very different sensuous properties (some derived from sight, some from smell, some from hearing, touch, and taste) be recognized as the properties of *the same thing*?⁴⁴ Here Kant, and Hegel with him, leaves the theory of “Perception” and enters into a very different view, namely, that we *contribute* the concept of substance in order to constitute—not simply recognize—particular objects in their causal and spatio-temporal relations with one another. Thus the “undoing” of “Perception” is once again similar to the breakdown of “Sense Certainty”: in both cases, we (that is, the proponent of the respective theory) assumed that something was *given* to us—in chapter 1 the objects themselves and in chapter 2 the object with all of its properties. In both cases, we assumed that these could be known “immediately,” that is, without any contribution from the understanding, without conceptualization *as* a particular object of a particular kind. And in both cases, Hegel’s reply is that *nothing is simply given to us immediately through the senses*. Experience requires concepts—“unconditioned universals”—which consciousness provides. This is not at any point to deny that all our knowledge is sensuous. It is only to deny that nothing “*originates in the sensuous*” (129). What we perceive is not simply based upon or inferred from the “data” of the senses but already presupposes understanding. With this we should shift into chapter 3, “Force and Understanding,” and a consideration of what Hegel calls “the unconditioned universal.” But first, let us consider where we have been and what we have done.

44. One should object that Kant’s intuitions are particulars, not universals, and therefore not what Hegel is calling “properties.” But here one can also point out that the status of properties has long been in question: Russell once said that properties are “repeatable particulars” and argued that the choice of interpretations is a matter of “temperament.”

c. Dialectical Interlude:
The "Logic" of Hegel's Transition

If a man never contradicts himself, it is because he never says anything. —Miguel de Unamuno

A detailed commentary on "Perception" would require nothing less than a whole history of Western ontology, from the "problem of the One and the Many" among the ancients to the various debates about the empiricist program and the concept of "substance" among the moderns. But what is of much more immediate concern to us here—mediated by our curiosity about Hegel's own intentions—is the relationship between chapters 1 and 2, "Sense-Certainty" and "Perception." It is said to be a "necessary" transition, but in what sense? It is said to be "a movement intrinsic to consciousness." What does this mean?

The first step in the translation is the breakdown of "Sense-Certainty." We have already seen what this is, the fact that, as a theory of knowledge, it cannot do what it claims to be able to do—to give an account of our identification of particular objects, through "immediate acquaintance." It is not a formal "contradiction," perhaps, but it is a devastating inadequacy, and enough to force us to give up the theory or at least stop defending it. But *must we, logically*, move on to "Perception"? The answer clearly seems to be "No." One could simply give up the theory of knowledge, drop out of philosophy the way so many undergraduates are doing, and proclaim profound indifference about the problem.⁴⁵ One could stop defending sense-certainty but continue to believe it, confident even if without cause that it is nevertheless true: it is only a Hegelian trick that has made it seem otherwise. One could take as the conclusion of "Sense-Certainty" the view that did indeed dominate most of the history of philosophy and still provides the second step in most philosophy classes—*scepticism*. One could conclude, in other words, that we cannot know what knowledge is, or that, if we do, we cannot know whether or not we know anything. But the step that Hegel takes and declares as "necessary" is none of these. It is rather a matter of what Hegel calls "determinate negation," in

45. One need not stop doing philosophy to give up its pursuits; in fact, much of modern philosophy has been continued by philosophers from Hume to Wittgenstein who declared the entire discipline a mistake or a "disease." And yet they keep doing it—sometimes brilliantly—as if to cure themselves. It is this view that Hegel so harshly criticizes as the "despair of doubt" and rightly chastises for being "anti-philosophical," even if today it has become "mainstream" philosophy.

other words, a rejection of sense-certainty that at the same time suggests the acceptance of another theory. And since sense-certainty broke down precisely in its claim to know particulars and instead knew universals, the next “natural” move is to say that knowledge consists entirely of universals, through which one identifies particulars.

“Determinate negation” is by no means unique entailment. We have just mentioned several other conclusions which “follow upon” “Sense-Certainty” with just as much conviction as “Perception”—giving up the project, giving up the effort to carry out the project oneself, concluding that the project is unworkable and retreating to scepticism (“indeterminate negation”). So what one might argue here is that *if* one resolves to pursue the project (to formulate an adequate theory of knowledge) *then* “Perception” follows “Sense-Certainty” as the “necessary” next step. But this turns out not to be the case either. One might muddle on indefinitely, resolved to find a way of defending sense-certainty that will escape Hegel’s various objections; or one might leap right into Kant, concluding that if particular objects aren’t given, then we must in some sense constitute them out of the manifold of sensory intuition. One might conclude precociously that the problem in “Sense-Certainty” was the fact that it mentioned nothing about our relationships with other people and that knowledge, having an essential social dimension, requires such a sociological account before it can explain how it is that individuals in a linguistic community can refer to particular things through language. And indeed one might follow the troublesome arguments of “Sense-Certainty” with a kind of mysticism, insisting that our knowledge is immediately of the Absolute but that we cannot, by the nature of the case, make any distinctions within the Absolute except in some secondary and purely conventional way. And indeed, this was the viewpoint taken up by several of Hegel’s contemporaries. If the truth of “Sense-Certainty” is that the truth is universal and one cannot immediately apprehend particulars, then why not suggest that we immediately apprehend the grandest universal of all? So even given the project of these early chapters (to pursue the theory of knowledge), “Perception” does not follow from “Sense-Certainty.” There is no strictly logical relationship to be found there.

One might conclude at this point, as a great many commentators have (and if not here, in the next chapter or the next) that Hegel just got it wrong and failed to follow his own method—that is, assuming he *had* a method. Or else, joining with another army of commentators, one might conclude that Hegel has no proper method, that “the dialectic” is a myth and that the trees in this Hegelian forest are in-

deed “arbitrary.”⁴⁶ But “necessity” is not limited to strictly logical relationships, and explaining the breakdown (“contradiction”) in “Sense-Certainty” is not yet to explain the “determinate negation” of that form in “Perception.” Why perception? But even the best commentators, having given us an admirably clear account of the breakdown in chapter 1, take the movement into chapter 2 as self-explanatory: e.g. Charles Taylor—“move to a fresh stage”⁴⁷; Quentin Lauer—“cry out for forward movement”⁴⁸; J.N. Findlay—“it must pass over into Perceptual Consciousness.”⁴⁹ The question is, *why* must we so move, so “pass over”. The dialectic has two steps: “contradiction” (or some form of internal difficulties) and movement. The movement must be explained too.

One simple-minded alternative, the most popular of all *a priori*, is to suppose that “Perception” stands to “Sense-Certainty” as its *antithesis* (with “Force and Understanding” as their *synthesis*.) But it is by no means clear in what sense an opposing antithesis necessarily follows from the denial of a thesis. It is true that, by *association*, opposing theses remind us of one another just as black reminds us of white, and tall reminds us of short. “Idealism” is “naturally” paired with “realism,” and “free will” inevitably raises the question of “determinism.” But this hardly makes the transition from “Sense-Certainty” to “Perception” *necessary* in any sense, and the suggestion that this is the movement of the *Phenomenology* threatens to reduce the whole progression to a series of free associations. And in any case, “Perception” is not simply *opposed* to “Sense-Certainty”; it shares its basic project—to formulate an adequate theory of knowing—and it shares its sense of “the given,” though in one case universals are given and in the other “bare” particulars. They both try to make sense of our knowledge of particulars and, for similar reasons, both of them fail. The “dialectic,” even in this initial transition, is not thesis and antithesis, nor synthesis either.

A simply unsupportable suggestion, but one implied by a great many scholars who have suggested a *general* account of the dialectic instead of a specific analysis of particular transitions, is that one form has just *happened* to follow another in the history of the development of Spirit. But nothing of philosophical importance “just happens” for Hegel, and even if such a historical account were plausible for some of the

46. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 93.

47. Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 134.

48. Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 53.

49. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 89.

self-consciously historical transitions in chapter 6, it is not even remotely plausible here. Hegel does not suppress all mention of particular philosophers for nothing, and it is clear that there is no single definitive sequence in which the theory called "Perception" historically followed the theory called "Sense-Certainty." No doubt examples could be found (e.g. in empiricism and Leibniz's rationalism) but one could find just as many sequences in which the order was precisely the opposite.

If the "necessity" that Hegel discusses in the transition from form to form is not in any sense a logical entailment, perhaps it is rather a *teleological* necessity, necessary to get from one form to another, in order to realize some ultimate purpose or *telos*. A strong interpretation would be this,—that there is only one route to get there, and so every transition on the route becomes necessary. On this account, there is nothing in the transition itself between chapters 1 and 2 which would give us a clue to the necessity of that move; it becomes apparent to us only when looking at the project as a whole. Hegel sometimes talks this way (in the Preface and Introduction) but it has yet to be made even remotely plausible, by Hegel or anyone else, that the path he traces in the *Phenomenology* is in any sense the *only* way to get us to think our way from common-sense certainty to "the Absolute." Even granting that there would have to be *some* path (if one is not, like the Romantics, to accomplish this task in a single intuitive leap) there may be several, some of which would bypass "Perception" altogether. A much weaker form of the teleological interpretation would then be this: given that the path must take *some* route, and that the route Hegel chooses does in fact go through "Perception," the transition from "Sense-Certainty" to "Perception" is necessary in just that sense. But what sense? In the sense that driving over a single patch of road is "necessary," given that one has chosen to take that road? Our account has degenerated into metaphors, and not very insightful metaphors at that. What is left out of the teleological account is precisely what we are looking for, namely, the specific *argument* that carries us from chapter 1 to chapter 2, whatever we might also say about the place of that one transition and those two chapters in the scope of the larger project, the self-realization of *Geist*.

Perhaps one of the most philosophically insightful suggestions regarding these chapters and this transition was made by Charles Taylor, only hinted at in his big book⁵⁰ but stated boldly and developed persuasively in his earlier essay, "The Opening Arguments of Hegel's

50. Taylor, *Hegel*, pp. 127ff and 140ff.

Phenomenology.”⁵¹ He interprets the arguments from chapter 1 to 2 and from chapter 2 to 3 as *transcendental* arguments, à la Kant. Such arguments cannot always be translated into valid deductive arguments; in fact, the problem that philosophers have had with such arguments ever since Kant is trying to figure out in what sense they are arguments *at all*. But Kant surely thought they were valid arguments, and it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that Hegel, in so far as he understood them, thought that they were too. A transcendental argument establishes the *necessary conditions* for experience—or for a certain kind of experience. Those necessary conditions are such that, if they are not realized, our experience would be very different from what it is. Indeed, the transcendental conditions of experience as such, according to Kant, are those without which we could have no experience whatever. Such conditions would include seeing things as substantial objects in the world “outside” of us, seeing things in causal relationships, seeing things in space and through time and assuming that things remain what they are even when they are not being experienced by us. The transcendental arguments of the first *Critique*, accordingly, were arguments intended to establish such conditions as necessary for experience.

For Kant, “necessary” was to be taken in a very strong sense; “necessary” conditions were not only one set of conditions without which experience would not be what it is (or would not be at all); they were the *only* set of conditions. Moreover, Kant introduced two different kinds of transcendental arguments, which he called “progressive” and “regressive”; the purpose of the latter was to demonstrate that a set of conditions were indeed conditions; the former had the more difficult task of proving (or “deducing”) that these were the only possible set of conditions and therefore “necessary.” The problem was that the two forms of argument were not always easily distinguishable, for it was not always clear what counted as a demonstration that a set of conditions was presupposed by experience and what counted as a “deduction” of the uniqueness and “necessity” of those conditions. Moreover, there was a dangerous tendency to waffle between “the possibility of experience (as such)” and “the possibility of experience of a certain kind.” For example, in Kant’s enormously complicated and confusing “transcendental deduction” of the category of “causation,”⁵² the argument wobbles between the very strong claim that without *causality* we could have no experience whatever, the weaker claim that without some orderly connections between experience we

51. Taylor, in MacIntyre, *Hegel*, pp. 151–87.

could not have any knowledge, and the still weaker claim that, without causality our experience would be very different from what it is. And since Leibniz, to name one philosopher whose work Kant knew as well as his own, had argued a world-view that dispensed with much of what Kant defined (in the strong sense) as causality, he already knew a counter argument to (at least) his very strong claim.

Now what is presupposed, or at least accepted without question in the transcendental arguments that pervade the first two chapters of the *Phenomenology*, is the fact that we *do* have knowledge of—can pick out, identify and re-identify—particular objects. Taylor uses Wittgenstein and his private language argument as an example (which we discussed in section *a* of this chapter):

The rock-bottom starting point of Wittgenstein's argument can be understood as this: that our concepts, being general, are used to reidentify fresh examples of the sort of thing that falls under them, that a distinction must thus be possible between correct and incorrect reidentification and hence right and wrong use of the term. This in turn founds the necessity of criteria, and it is the supposed incapacity of private ostensive definition to provide criteria that justifies its being swept aside as a picture of experience and its relation to language.⁵³

It is this notion of the *criterion* that is central to the *Phenomenology* too, the need for a “yardstick” (*Masztab*) to measure our experience;

as a notion of consciousness, it [a theory, as in “Sense-Certainty” and “Perception”] must contain an idea of experience, of what it is to know an object. Let us try to experience in this way, to have this kind of knowledge. If it turns out the effective experience guided by this model contradicts it, that we cannot attain knowledge in this way, then it will be shown to be impossible and will have to be changed. We will make the changes that the contradiction revealed by this particular experience has shown to be necessary, and this will yield us another notion of consciousness with which to start another test.⁵⁴

This is Taylor's concrete suggestion, that the contradiction (that we found in sense-certainty) will itself show us what more is needed for an adequate account. In particular, what “Sense-Certainty” showed us was that we need “universals” in any such adequate account.⁵⁵

52. *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed., p. 218.

53. Taylor, in MacIntyre, p. 153.

54. *Ibid.* 159.

55. Note that the “form of consciousness” for Taylor is not primarily a theory (or “notion”) of knowledge but an actual attempt to experience in a certain way. I have argued, conversely, that the form is first of all a theory which can (but need not always) include an attempt to “live” that theory. In fact, the two characterizations are just opposite sides of the same philosophical coin, since Hegel is quite emphatic that the conception (including our theories) and experience itself are co-determining. Thus every theory of knowledge has as its correlate an ontology as well. But I think that Taylor

A transcendental argument, then, “will thus have to start from undeniable characteristics of experience; and since it will go on from there to show that the various inadequate models of consciousness are incompatible with these characteristics, which on the contrary require other conceptions if they are to hold.” At least in the first chapters, Taylor tells us, “Hegel’s arguments can easily and convincingly be presented in transcendental form” (160). Regarding the first chapter, Taylor’s analysis is similar to ours in the preceding section: “there are two main ways in which the attempt [to make sense-certainty *say* what it “means”] takes us beyond the limits of sensible certainty,”⁵⁶ first, the fact that only through “selection” of particulars can there be knowledge (one cannot “take in everything,” says Taylor, without “falling over into unconsciousness, a trancelike stare” (163)). Second, sense-certainty cannot be “in immediate contact with sensible particulars, without the mediation of general terms, which not only introduce selectivity . . . but involve grasping the objects before us through aspects that they have in common or could have in common with other things” (ibid). Notice that these two conclusions introduce the two main features of perception, namely, the continuing emphasis on the identification of particulars as the criterion (*Maszstab*) for adequacy and the centrality of properties (“aspects they have in common or could have in common with other things”). Thus we began our discussion of “Perception” with the cavalier announcement that “Perception begins with what has been established by the end of chapter 1” and the new form of consciousness, in general, can be said to follow the old in just this way. The breakdown of one form shows us quite specifically what more is needed for adequacy, and the “determinate negation” of the first form is *ipso facto* the beginning of the new. We began with particulars, only to find that one could not know particulars without knowing their properties, and so, in chapter 2, we began with “the Thing and its properties.” The relationships between these forms is *supersession* (*das Aufheben*), *preserving* the truth but *negating* its inadequacies (113). The first argument “sets the stage for the next.”⁵⁷ Once we understand the “contradiction” in the first form, we will have our starting point for the next one.

This is an extremely attractive theory; what is presupposed in every case is that there is a set of agreed upon “undeniable characteristics

goes too far (in his *Hegel*, p. 133) when he says that we “construct a reality to meet the standard”. This may well be the case in some subsequent forms in the *PG*, but it does not seem plausible on any interpretation here in the first three chapters.

56. Note slight alteration in the translation here; Taylor translates *sinnliche Gewissheit* as “sensible certainty.”

57. Taylor, p. 168.

of experience,” and that the failure of one form of consciousness to account for those characteristics will lead us to another that will make up for that failure. The first point is problematic, but one “undeniable characteristic” of our knowing anything surely is that we can in some way (verbally, by pointing) pick out the particulars that we know, and sense-certainty fails to account for this.⁵⁸ But does this failure so readily carry us to a new form which is its corrective, or has Hegel conveniently taken us there, not as a matter of “necessity” but as a textual courtesy? In other words, what serves as the *conclusion* of a transcendental argument, if what we are looking for are “the necessary conditions of experience” and we already know that one constituent of our experience is our ability to pick out particular objects?

The basic form of a “transcendental argument,” whose point is to prove that some feature of consciousness is in fact a “necessary condition of possible experience,” is something like this:

(We) have an experience with (undeniable) characteristic *a*.

(We) could not have an experience with *a* unless (our) consciousness had feature *B*.

Therefore, (our) consciousness has feature *B*.

Characteristic *a*, for example, might be the ability to pick out particular objects, or seeing objects in three-dimensional space. Feature *B*, for instance, might be the application of the rules of cause and effect to our every experience. Two problems present themselves immediately; one is the difficulty in distinguishing the characteristic *a* from the feature of consciousness *B*; is our experience of a single three-dimensional space an (undeniable) characteristic of experience or a necessary feature of consciousness? And if this distinction is not clear, then the argument is already threatened with a vicious circularity; what we prove may just be a restatement of what we begin by insisting is undeniable. Second, it should be evident that the above argument form is “regressive,” not “progressive”; it may prove that a certain feature *B* is necessary for characteristic *a*, but it does not settle the question whether (undeniable) characteristic *a* is itself a necessary

58. The problematic nature of the seemingly innocent point about “undeniable characteristics of experience” emerges as soon as one suggests a candidate for such a characteristic that is not utterly banal. Kant insisted on the unity of consciousness, for example, but even he admitted that this asserted very little of substance and, on any interesting interpretation, we can see that this ‘unity’ is not the case in some counter-examples: Jekyll-and-Hyde schizophrenics, or Anthony Quinton’s imaginative example of the person whose dreams were sufficiently coherent and continuous that he experienced (one hesitates to say ‘lived’) two complete but exclusive lives. Is three-dimensional space an “undeniable characteristic” of experience? Indeed, is the ability to pick out particular objects—as opposed to recognizing patterns or general types of events, for example—an undeniable characteristic of experience? Whose experience? (And if we say simply “ours”, who is included in the scope of that possessive pronoun?)

aspect of experience, which is what Kant insisted on proving. The slippage between the supposedly “undeniable” characteristic of experience and the “necessary” feature to be established allows for sufficient confusion, in Kant’s “transcendental deduction of the categories,” for instance, that the success or even the exact form of the argument is always in question. Moreover, the criterion for “necessity” in Kant’s arguments is “the only possible,” such that a feature *B* is necessary as a condition for characteristic *a* if it is *the only possible* feature which would allow for *a*. But this is an extremely strong criterion for necessity, and it leaves open questions about the necessity of co-conditions, pre-conditions for these conditions, and the possibility that, in some very different context or consciousness, what appears as a necessary condition for *a* may no longer be the only possible condition. (In a creature whose only sense was smell or hearing, for example, the necessary conditions for the perception of space might be quite different than those in a creature like ourselves whose primary senses are vision and kinaesthetics.) Indeed, the crucial twist in Hegel’s arguments is precisely this question of alternative “forms of consciousness” and different contexts, which require quite different sets of necessary conditions even if the (undeniable) characteristic of experience (e.g. picking out particular objects) remains the same. But the characteristics of experience are not constant either, and here is the greatest single problem with the Kantian argument. Even if one accepted the regressive argument to the effect that *B* is necessary for *a* in the requisite sense, it does not follow that *a* is a necessary feature of (any) experience. The word “undeniable” then serves only to beg the question of necessity. In fact, Hegel is arguing that the supposedly undeniable ability to pick out particular objects—considered in isolation from conceptual abilities—is not undeniable at all. The categories Kant putatively shows to be necessary for knowledge of objects are not yet shown to be necessary features of consciousness, unless the fact that we know objects is itself shown to be necessary, and this is precisely what Hegel is calling into question.⁵⁹

Transcendental arguments are sometimes treated as *reductio ad absurdum* arguments; their form is,

Suppose (our) consciousness did not have feature *B*.

59. Calling our knowledge of particular objects into question, of course, does not mean *denying* that we have any such knowledge. But it does mean calling into question certain descriptions of such knowledge as well as claims that such knowledge is autonomous and fundamental. This is the argument of “Sense-Certainty”; as a transcendental argument, it might be, “we could not do anything like pick out particular objects unless we also perceived properties (universals) and could describe the objects in terms of those properties.”

If consciousness did not have feature *B*, then (we) could not have experiences with characteristic *a*.

But (we) do have experiences with characteristic *a*.

Therefore, the supposition is false, and (our) consciousness must have feature *B*.

But there is a curious feature of such arguments, which Hegel pointed out against Kant. One can turn the tables on a *reductio ad absurdum* argument if only by shifting one's sense of what it is that is absurd. So long as we insist that characteristic *a* is undeniable, the argument seems to go through. But consider this;

(We) have an experience with characteristic *a*.

(We) could not have an experience with *a* unless (our) consciousness had feature *B*.

But *B* is absurd.

Therefore, (we) do not have experience with characteristic *a* after all.⁶⁰

Indeed, Hegel uses exactly this perversion of a transcendental argument in an attack on Kant's second *Critique* (*of Practical Reason*), in the *Phenomenology* as well as elsewhere. Kant had argued that certain characteristics of our moral life were undeniable; furthermore, he argued that these undeniable characteristics of our moral life presupposed certain principles—or “postulates of practical reason” as their necessary conditions. By assuming that the characteristics of our moral life were undeniable (simply by presuming and describing them, without argument) Kant sought thereby to establish the necessity of the “postulates,” especially “God, Freedom and Immortality.” It is an undeniable characteristic of virtue, he argued, that it be rewarded, if not in this life then in the next; Kant called this the “Summum Bonum” (see *Phenomenology*, esp. 365ff. “Spirit Certain of Itself”). Kant's argument was, in crude form;

If it is rational to be moral, then the Summum Bonum must be true.

(That is, there must be a God who rewards and punishes, etc.)

Therefore, the Summum Bonum must be true.

But, Hegel rightly objects, this does not in any sense *prove* the Summum Bonum, and one can just as validly conclude that, if the Summum Bonum is not true, then it is not rational to be moral. In Kant's terms, he has given us only a *regressive* argument, which specifies a

60. In “Sense-Certainty,” the argument would be, “we pick out particulars by immediate acquaintance; we can do this insofar as our experience is not ‘mediated,’ which means that we cannot describe or for that matter even individuate (pick out) particular things; therefore, we cannot know particular objects by immediate acquaintance, for this is absurd.”

condition without which morality (as he conceives of it) would not be rational.⁶¹ What more would be needed to make this into a proof of the Summum Bonum would be a preliminary assertion that it is indeed rational to be moral. But this would beg the whole question of the second *Critique*, which is precisely to demonstrate that it is rational to be moral (as Kant conceives of morality). And so too, one can easily imagine Hegel responding to Taylor's analysis: "No, I am not using transcendental arguments, *à la* Kant, for they succeed as valid arguments only insofar as they begin by assuming what they purport to prove." Hegel is not particularly interested in seeking out or proving the necessary conditions or undeniable characteristics of (our) experience, if only because he is more interested in questioning the undeniability of those characteristics. He is indeed arguing that a necessary condition for knowledge of particulars is the use of universals (both conditioned and unconditioned) but this is at best a part of his concern, and though it may work as an interpretation of these early chapters it becomes increasingly implausible as the book continues.

As insightful as the "transcendental argument" interpretation of Hegel's arguments may be, it still leaves unanswered the critical question; how do we explain the transitions between the chapters, from one form to another. Even if we accept that the first two chapters are a series of transcendental arguments whose purpose is to establish certain necessary features of consciousness, why do we follow one argument ("Sense-Certainty") with this other one ("Perception")? In what sense is the rejection of the thesis that "knowledge is immediate knowledge of sensuous particulars" *necessarily* followed by the thesis that "the object of knowledge is 'the Thing and its properties'?"

What is going on in this all-important transition? The relation of sense-certainty to perception is not one of "thesis to antithesis"; it is not to be explained by appeal to chronology or teleology, and though it has strong affinities with Kant's "transcendental arguments" it cannot be construed as such; in fact, it can just as well be interpreted as a *rejection* of such arguments as unnecessarily limited and "rigid." I think the best interpretation of this move from "Sense-certainty" to "Perception" is rather divided into two steps, which are kept quite separate; first, there is the demonstration of the inadequacy of a form

61. One perennial misinterpretation of Kant's first *Critique* takes the argument to be the attempt to prove the validity of science and mathematics, which Kant does by demonstrating the necessity of certain principles, which he establishes by pointing out that science and mathematics depend upon them. This is indeed the way the arguments (as "regressive") appear in the *Prolegomena*, but not in the *Critique*. It is a fallacy that may be true of Kant's moral philosophy, but not of his epistemology. The necessity of the categories must be demonstrated independently of the dependence of science and math upon them.

of consciousness in its own terms, according to its own claims. These need not be “contradictions” in any formal sense; for the time being, let’s just call them “difficulties” and look at a logical contradiction as being just the ultimate difficulty. After the demonstration of difficulties, which is a form of “indeterminate negation,” that is, which forces us to reject that form of consciousness we find ourselves in search of another to take its place. The first part of the dialectic is a form of *reductio ad absurdum* argument, showing that a form won’t do and that one of its basic suppositions—usually either its claim to have met a certain criterion, or the criterion itself—must be given up. But the “must” here only has as much force as the intolerability of the “difficulty,” and we can say in general that it is virtually never a logical “must” since one can *always* claim on the behalf of a certain form of consciousness that it has been misstated, misunderstood, or has not been shown to have “difficulties” which are fatal. The search for the following form, which will take its place, is never necessary either, which is not to say, in the thinking of too many philosophers from Socrates to A.J. Ayer, that it is “arbitrary.”⁶²

What Hegel means when he insists on “determinate negation” is, first of all, that we don’t give up the ship, don’t just drop out of philosophy in despair (the undergraduate option) or become sophistry-minded sceptics (the choice of some graduate students). It does not mean that another form of consciousness follows. But given that one pursues the project—in this case the development of an adequate theory of knowledge which enables us to account for our identification of particular objects—a number of alternatives to the refuted view (sense-certainty) present themselves. Something has gone wrong; the mistake is to think that it is necessarily just one thing. But if our theory fails to account for our identification of particulars, we can give up the demand to account for particulars, or give up our quest for a theory or give up the idea that knowledge comes from the senses just as well as give up the claim that knowing involves immediate acquaintance. The move to the next step is always a *choice*, and a choice whose wisdom is not to be determined in the move itself, but only in its *consequences*. Does this proposal succeed where its predecessor has failed? The choice is not blind or arbitrary. It is restricted and encouraged by several factors; first, that the new proposal faces the is-

62. In this analysis and the discussion to follow, I am deeply indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre, who helped to clarify and forced me to defend some of these views in his graduate seminars on some of the later sections of the *PG* in Austin, the Winter of 1980. He too insists upon the indeterminacy of the second stage, but he also insists upon a strict construal of the need to show “contradiction” in a strictly logical sense, a criterion according to which Hegel fails at virtually every turn.

sue raised by the old one, though there is no determinate way it must do this (it can reject the criterion as well as formulate any number of alternatives to it); second, the new proposal can be seen as more or less promising in light of the arguments of the last. If it is too similar, it will no doubt share the same fate—which is why it will often tend to be an “opposite” (which is only to say, “quite different,” not an “antithesis”). If there is a “logic” here, it is what Karl Popper called “the logic of discovery,” not a logic that connects the two proposals as such. Indeed, the comparison here should not be a series of philosophical arguments, such as one finds in Kant’s first *Critique* or Fichte’s conscientiously “deductive” attempt to “systematize” Kant, but rather the successive formations of hypotheses in science, each an attempt to explain some phenomenon, each significantly different from the last and some of which, in fact, are aimed at explaining away the phenomenon itself. To say that they do not follow one from the other, or that there is no pre-established “transcendental” criterion for deciding what choice of hypothesis is wise and which foolish is not to deny that there is good and bad science, wise and foolish ways of proceeding, or that some hypotheses do not better succeed their predecessors than others. Indeed, bad science, in Hegel as well as in physics and astronomy, would sometimes best be seen as a failure of imagination rather than a breakdown in logic as such. There is never a set standard about how to proceed, since at some point, one can decide to change the standards as well.⁶³

Perception, then, becomes a hypothesis formulated to explain what sense-certainty cannot—our knowledge of particular objects. As a hypothesis, it becomes an intelligent alternative to sense-certainty, one with a substantial philosophical ancestry, one which is surely suggested by the *kind* of a breakdown Hegel has forced in sense-certainty (that is, having to do with universals) but does not follow from it. Indeed, it is only *in retrospect* that we recognize perception as a substantial improvement over sense-certainty. The retrospect involves the actual testing of hypotheses and our eventual arrival at *some* hypothesis which seems to satisfy the criterion we have chosen; then we can

63. Taylor points out, for example, that every test of a form of consciousness is also a test of the test; the test (the criterion) can be changed as readily as the form. The argument here displays Hegel’s often commented-on affinity with certain contemporary theories of science, most notably Thomas Kuhn’s classic *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which “normal science” proceeds routinely according to the standards of an established “paradigm” until the paradigm itself begins to break down, to be replaced—rarely in any logical fashion—by another (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962). My account of Hegel’s dialectic here has certain affinities with Gil Harman’s “inference to the best explanation” theory in epistemology. Harman, *Thought* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978).

say which hypotheses or forms were wise and which were foolish, which helped our understanding and which hindered, even if one also argues (with Paul Feyerabend) that *every* hypothesis, no matter how foolish, contributes to our knowledge and to the support we eventually give to the hypothesis we accept;

There is no idea, however ancient and absurd, that is not capable of improving our knowledge. The whole history of thought is absorbed into science and is used for improving every single theory.⁶⁴

This is also compatible with the possibility that, in terms of the “dialectic,” the two hypotheses might have been proposed in the reverse order, or, in terms of the *Phenomenology*, we might have begun with the (equally) common-sense theory of Perception and then, after demonstrating its ambiguities and difficulties, decided to adopt an ontology of bare particulars, known immediately *through* the properties as the essence of the “Thing” of Perception. Hegel’s much celebrated notion of “*aufheben*,” in other words, might nonetheless display a *symmetrical* nature, such that form A is supplanted by (some version of) form B, or form B is supplanted by (some version of) form A, and neither ordering is preferable in the light of further deliberations. Perhaps either leads us to form C, which we now accept. And so, we can say, the “necessity” of the move from “Sense-Certainty” to “Perception” consists just in the fact that, from some later point in the sequence of hypotheses, notably, from “Force and Understanding,” we can see (1) why the first was rejected, and (2) how the second solved at least some of the problems presented by the first.⁶⁵

Alasdair MacIntyre has illustrated this kind of retrospective “necessity” by appeals to the history of science, for instance, the following:⁶⁶ We say that Newton’s physics was a dramatic improvement over

64. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: New Left Books, 1975).

65. This retrospective necessity can be interpreted in the *PG* in several ways. The historicist way would be to claim that the apparent “necessity” of the sequences is always open to revision, always depending on the hypothesis or “form of consciousness” we now accept, with no ultimate or “absolute” standpoint available to us. Thus a student who is thinking of going to medical school might look at his past primarily in terms of just those incidents which confirm (or disconfirm) his present outlook; but when he decides instead to become a mercenary soldier, the entire pre-medical sequence becomes more or less irrelevant, and steps which seemed necessary at the time are not even remembered. There will be new standpoints—which may at the time even seem “absolute”; but no standpoint has any such status, no matter how all-encompassing it may seem. (What seems all-encompassing may itself reflect lack of experience or lack of imagination.) The second way of looking at the retrospective necessity of the steps of the dialectic is the absolutist way; Quentin Lauer, for example, insists that Hegel himself has already reached the Absolute, perhaps several times, and now returns to lead us unflinchingly there, a German Bodhisattva of sorts, the philosopher once again returning to Plato’s cave.

66. In seminar, and with respect to Hegel’s analysis of “phenology” in chapter 5 of the *PG*, in MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel*, ch. 8.

Aristotle's, and that Einstein was again an improvement over Newton. Now there are two ways of making such comparisons hopeless: The first is to assume that they were working on exactly the same problems with exactly the same standards, even if they had different access to instruments and some different beliefs about the world. This means that we are sure to misunderstand at least one of them, casting Aristotle, for example, in the context of Newtonian mechanics and thereby thoroughly misunderstanding Aristotle.⁶⁷ The second hopeless procedure is to suppose that their problems and theories are ultimately incomparable, that each was appropriate for its own times and within its context. This means that there is nothing to say, and it also suggests the absurd conclusion that what Aristotle meant by "falling objects" was *entirely* different from what Newton meant by a similar expression.

The current mode of description for such entirely different frameworks or "paradigms" is "incommensurability." Two theories are "incommensurable" when the terms of one are not even translatable into the terms of the other and the contexts of application are so different that no intelligible comparison or contrast is possible. Nevertheless, a somewhat weaker version of commensurability would allow comparative evaluation even without mutual translation as such, so long as some common standard can be found, for instance, the ability of each theory to explain (in its own terms) a certain range of phenomena (e.g. falling objects, celestial movements, inertia, and momentum). Indeed, the "common standard" in question might even be foreign to both theories, or at least, not explicitly formulated by them. How do we know when we have got a criterion that fairly evaluates both theories? One way is to see what claims are most protected in each theory, which claims are held onto even in the face of the most devastating counter-examples and apparent contradictions. Thus the medieval development of the Aristotelean physics had taken that viewpoint to its logical extremes, explored for centuries its various consequences and had derived quite a few difficulties bordering on contradictions within the theory. But, as pointed out above, this does not require one to give up a theory, for one can *always* maintain that the difficulties can be resolved, though by means yet unimagined. The claim of the Newtonian, therefore, is to be able to show how these difficulties arise *inevitably* in the Aristotelean system and to eliminate them in his own. It is not that Newton is "better" than Aristotle, but what he can do is to correct some of the difficulties the Aristotelean

67. For example, see D.J. O'Connor, in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1964), ch. 3: "Much of his science was merely wrong. And we must discount these mistakes and their influence if we are to judge his system fairly" (p. 42).

view gets into *by its own standards*. But we cannot conclude too fast that the transition is asymmetrical, that one could not derive difficulties in Newton that a latter day Aristotelean might show to be inevitable within that view but eliminable in his own. This is precisely what has happened, for example, from the Einsteinian standpoint today. (Our view of the superiority of Newton—reinforced by the self-congratulatory version of “the scientific method” we are all taught in high school—is in fact predicated on the contingency that Newton happened on the scene after Aristotle and that few of our high school teachers understand Einstein.) This is not to say that it would be *the same* Aristotle of the 4th century B.C. that one might imagine emerging in the 19th century but, nevertheless, it was a very Aristotelean position that dominated the sciences in Germany at the turn of the 19th century. The arguments that Hegel levels against the Newtonian world-view in chapter 3 are largely based on a distinctively Aristotelean viewpoint.

The transition from Sense-Certainty to Perception, therefore, serves as a model for the transitions in the rest of the book. To expect deductive necessity is inevitably to be disappointed, and this means either dismissing Hegel as a failure or making excuses for him. But he is not a failure and needs no excuses. He has a strategy (something less than a “method”) and he follows it with precision, at least within distinctive sections of the *Phenomenology*—for example, the first three chapters. The strategy is to take up a position—it does not matter which—and push it until it breaks down according to its own criteria. Then, taking up those same criteria, one has a choice of several alternative views trying to satisfy the same criteria, or one can choose a new criterion, presumably in the light of the view that has just been pursued. The first step is logically rigorous; the second is not. But here, in the first few chapters, the sequence is quite simple; since we retain the same limited pursuit—the development of an adequate theory of knowledge—and insist on the same central criterion—the identification and reidentification of particular objects—the sequence is simply a series of hypotheses to try to provide that theory and satisfy that criterion.⁶⁸

68. I have made it sound too much as if there is only one criterion. This is not true. There is one criterion which has come to our attention, because it is the one which is giving us trouble. But there are other criteria too—for example, the criterion that what we know must in some sense be based (in part) upon our senses. But, since this criterion is never challenged, it need never be stated, at least in chapter 1. In chapter 2 it is (implicitly) part of our reason for rejecting the “substance” interpretation of “the Thing.” There are other criteria too, for example, the fact that the theory must be statable in German/(English), that at least some of the objects of knowledge are material objects, that I/we can know them, etc. But “the criterion” Hegel talks about will most likely be

*d. Force and Understanding:
Kant, Newton, and the Nature of Natural Laws*

The understanding does not derive its laws from, but prescribes them to, nature. —Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*

... the Understanding in truth comes to know nothing else but appearance. ... in fact, the Understanding experiences only *itself*.
—*Phenomenology*

Both sense-certainty and perception were theories of knowledge, attempts to specify what it is that we know when we know something, and how we know it. The first insists that what we know are the objects themselves, and the “how” is by way of immediate acquaintance. The second insists that we know particular objects too, but what we immediately know by acquaintance are not the objects themselves but their properties. Both views agree that what we know are particular objects; both agree that we know them through our senses. Both agree that the particularity of the object is *given* to us, prior to any efforts on our part, whether *as* a particular (in “Sense-Certainty”) or through its properties (in “Perception”). Both treat the “I” uncritically as a receptive individual “I” which first gets its data and only then applies concepts to this data. Both assume a unity and uniformity to experience, such that ambiguity (between particularly and universality, between “the Thing and its properties”) is their undoing. Both prove to be failures, and both for the same reason; they cannot in fact account for the particularity of objects.

Understanding is the Kantian faculty that applies concepts to experience; but what makes the Kantian concept of understanding different from the empiricist notion of the same faculty is the fact that it does not just *recognize* objects; it *constitutes* them. In other words, there are no objects (of experience) until the understanding has gone through and synthesized them. It does this by applying concepts which are *prior* to any particular experience, in other words, *a priori* concepts or *categories*. Hegel’s way of saying this is to say that the concepts of the understanding are not *conditioned* by the senses; they are *unconditioned universals*. They are not just applied to but *precede* experience as its organizing principles. And since it is the “I” (the transcendental ego) that supplies these concepts, it is no longer viewed as primarily a re-

the one that is the locus of trouble, not the only criterion. In fact, there will be one overriding criterion of consistency and coherence, but this criterion, because it is presupposed by all of the others, will not be stated at all, at least not until the very end, where it will emerge in terms of “Absolute Knowing.”

ceptor, but as an activity, namely, the activity of providing rules and laws which govern our every experience.

The transition from "Sense-Certainty" and "Perception" to "Understanding" depends upon the dramatic turn from the idea of "the given" (whether as objects or clusters of properties) to the view that particularity is determined by us, through the application of concepts. Toward the end of "Perception" (131), it has already been suggested that one view of the locus of particularity, namely, the Aristotelean notion of "substance," reduces particularity to just "a *thought*." (This was emphatically *not* Aristotle's view, but it certainly was the conclusion of John Locke). The chapter "Force and the Understanding" picks up this suggestion and elevates it to a theory; if particular objects are constituted by us through our concepts, then that explains why sense-certainty proved to be incapable of expressing what it supposedly knew prior to conceptualization; namely, it did not know anything at all. (Or rather, as a theory of knowledge, it refused to include the main factor that would allow for individuation.) Perception found itself hopelessly confused between the postulation of a "substance" beyond all possible experience and the unintelligible view that a thing was nothing but the sum of its properties (for what then would these be properties of?). But if it is the understanding that provides the concepts by which properties become properties of an object, then "substance" loses its air of the unknown, and at the same time we have a clear view of the sense in which properties are properties of something: namely, they are properties of a thing because we ourselves supply the concept of *substance* to synthesize them. In Hegel's more formidable terms, the Object is now its Concept: "Reality is defined by our conceptions of it, . . . the unity of 'being-for-self' and 'being-for-another'" (134).⁶⁹

The view so far is Kant's view in the first *Critique*. But it is important to note again that Hegel does not himself accept this view as such; he does not accept the Kantian view that there is a "manifold of intuition" which is *given* to us, for there are no sensations-in-themselves any more than there are things-in-themselves. (This was the point of "Sense-Certainty," that nothing is *given* to us "immediately".) He does not hold the view that concepts or categories are given to us either; the set of a priori concepts which are employed by the understanding are not given or fixed, as Kant supposed. This leads Hegel to com-

69. It is this contrast, rather than "in itself" and "for itself," that defines this part of the *PG*. Hegel refers to this new unity, however, with the unfortunate phrase "in and for itself." Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*: "... whether we speak of something being or becoming for someone or of something, we must not speak of a thing as either being or becoming just in and by itself."

plain (with an unfortunate lack of precision) that understanding is itself still “an object” for consciousness (132), since it has not grasped the fact that consciousness and its concepts are *ours*, and not simply given. Self-examination makes us free to change our concepts, i.e. “consciousness has not yet grasped the concept of the unconditioned as concept” (132). In a key phrase, Hegel advises us, “we have to think pure change, . . . or contradiction” (106). This is what the rest of the *Phenomenology* is about, not just the (Kantian) fact that we supply the concepts through which we constitute our experience, but the very un-Kantian concern about the “fluidity” of our concepts, and the very different ways in which they allow us to constitute our world. Moreover, Hegel thoroughly disagrees with Kant that the understanding is to be considered a realm unto its own, separated by the very nature of the human mind from the domain of practical activities. The idea of science and knowledge for its own sake, which so attracted the Enlightenment Kant, was not at all an agreeable notion to Hegel and his *praxis*-minded colleagues.

In “Sense-Certainty” and “Perception,” there was a persistent confusion of several key ingredients, “I” and the object, immediacy and mediation, particular and universal, thing and property. In every case, it would seem that one turned into the other. Sense-certainty demanded particulars and got stuck with universals; perception began with universals and seemed left with an inexperiencable or unintelligible sense of particularity. In “Force and the Understanding” these pairs begin to be fused such that all knowledge becomes, in that vague idealist phrase, “the unity of subject and object”; more precisely, there is no distinguishing what is given from what we contribute to our experience. Objects are particular but they are so by virtue of sense-conditioned universals (properties) which are themselves constituted as objects by way of unconditioned universals or concepts. The thing-in-itself now becomes *for us*, that is, in itself for us, because of the way we conceive of it. Now it is time to straighten out certain infelicities in Kant—the residual idea of the thing-in-itself and the causal theory of perception, as well as the unimaginative idea that the concepts through which we know the world are the fixed categories of Newton’s physics.

The first few pages of chapter 3 are misleadingly assuring; they tell us in no uncertain terms that we are now on our way to the Truth; we need only know a little bit about Kant’s philosophy and Hegel’s admiration of Kant to see that the problems we have been grappling with in the first two chapters are now about to be resolved. But things are not so simple, and it is at this point in the *Phenomenology* that the

first truly dramatic turn of events occurs—in fact, two of them: first, here is Kant’s “Copernican Revolution” turning our attention away from the objects and to the concepts we use to conceive of them; second, and more radically, we now cease trying to satisfy a demand—namely, the criterion we have so far accepted as the standard of an adequate theory of knowledge. We instead discard the criterion as well as our pursuit of knowledge (that is, a theory of knowledge), with an eye to something quite different. There is a dialectical reason for this, of course, and that is, now that we have a theory of knowledge in which, within the context of the epistemological tradition established by the question “What is it to know something?” we come to see that the question itself is incomplete. It wrongly presupposes an autonomous domain of knowledge, and wrongly supposes that it can solve its own problems. Despite the assurances of the opening lines, the argument of the very difficult third chapter seems to be that the Kantian solution to our epistemological question is not adequate at all. Insofar as it works, it shows its own inadequacy, namely, it leads inevitably to the conclusion that we cannot know anything for reasons that Kant himself had pointed out in his “antinomies” in the “Transcendental Dialectic”; for every sound and valid belief that we can provide for ourselves through the concepts of the understanding, there is another position that is opposed to this which can be shown to be equally sound and valid.

So long as one accepted the idea of a world-in-itself, the correspondence view of truth—the “matching-up” of our beliefs with the facts of the world—made some sense. But if one has argued, as Hegel and Fichte had argued, that there is no world in itself but only the world of phenomena constituted by us through our concepts, then the antinomies prove to be disastrous to Kant’s own program. Either they show that the world is contradictory, which is intolerable by the criterion that there must be one unified and harmonious truth, or we are pushed back to scepticism, which is also intolerable. What we find in chapter 3, therefore, is Hegel’s demonstration that the understanding cannot by itself give an account of how we know the world, in part because it considers knowledge independently of any practical or contextual concerns. In the very difficult section that follows (135–65) Hegel argues that “understanding” breaks down because it yields, and cannot decide between, contradictory accounts of the world. But what Hegel is arguing here is by no means just the specific doctrines of Kant’s philosophy; he is attacking the very idea of an independent domain of knowledge, the still powerful notion that there is such a thing as “pure science” and “knowledge for its own sake.” His argu-

ment is *not* that science thereby ignores its social consequences and responsibilities, which is just an “external” argument and thereby easily ignored by “pure” seekers after knowledge; it is first of all the demonstration that science cannot succeed *in its own terms*. Only then, in chapters 4 and 5, will Hegel suggest an alternative hypothesis, that no theory of knowledge makes any sense detached from the practical and social context in which it is inevitably involved.

It is the concept of “force” that plays this key role in the argument against a pure theory of “understanding.” The concept of “force,” which literally pops up from nowhere (136), is of course the central concept of physical science, or, at least, of Newtonian physics, which was considered by Kant to be the supreme scientific achievement of his day. Again, Hegel’s aim is not to criticize the purity of knowledge from the “outside,” by complaining about the inaccessibility of scientific jargon or the difficulty of its mathematics (which seems to some critics nowadays to be tantamount to an argument against it) but rather by taking up its own central feature and showing that it is inherently unsatisfactory. The debates surrounding Newton’s theory were well known to Hegel, and in particular he was partial to his own compatriot Leibniz, who had rejected the Newtonian edifice in general, and the concept of force in particular, as unworkable. But it is equally significant that Leibniz provided his own notion of “force” in his alternative theories, and that it had become one of those words—like the key words in science ever since—that had captured the popular and the philosophical imagination. “Force” had become a metaphor for any below-the-surface activity which could be used to explain movements and transformations. And, closest to home, Schelling had made the concept of “force” (and what he called “self-activity”) the key to his whole metaphysical system of nature.⁷⁰

The notion of activity “below the surface” is new in the argument of the *Phenomenology*. So far, in “Sense-Certainty” and “Perception,” we have been restricting ourselves to the level of superficial description of sensory objects—whether as particulars or conditioned universal properties. In “Perception,” we found ourselves forced, *via* Aristotle, to postulate some underlying substratum of “substance” to explain the unity of properties in a thing; but this postulation proved to be problematic just because it was not itself experiencible, because it was “behind” or “beneath” the properties. With understanding,

70. *Ideas Towards a Philosophy of Nature* (1797) and *System of Philosophy of Nature* (1798): “*produktiv Kraft* [is] mind striving to organize itself. So too, in the outer world, a universal tendency to organization must reveal itself. . . . The soul intuitively itself as an object within which is productive force” (*Werke*, I, 386); and “The force of nature is nothing other than the force of mind” (*ibid.*).

however, the idea of something “behind” experience is given a Kantian twist; it is not a substance but a self, namely, consciousness, which ties together and gives structure to experience. This means too that we are no longer content to merely *describe* what we know; we also are compelled to *explain* it. The concept of *force*, by the turn of the 18th century, was the dominant explanatory principle of science.

Understanding “solves” the problem of the identity of particulars by identifying the concepts we supply to experience and through which objects are constituted as particular. But this in turn gives rise to two new sets of distinctions, which begin our troubles all over again. First, there is this new distinction between what appears *in* experience (as “appearance”) and what is going on “below the surface” (as “force”). In Kant, there is an essential ambiguity between the activity of consciousness (the transcendental ego) and the forces that are to be found in the objects themselves. (Thus our opening quotation from the *Prolegomena*: “The understanding does not derive its laws from, but prescribes them to, nature.”)⁷¹ Hegel thus plays throughout this chapter on the equivocation and confusion of these two different sorts of activities, ultimately arguing that there is no distinction between explaining phenomena (as Newton thought he was doing) and merely re-describing them, since all that we are doing in any case is altering the concepts through which we constitute the objects of our experience.

The second new distinction, also essential to Kant, is the distinction between form and content (135).⁷² For Kant, the content is given in intuition; the form is provided by concepts. Ultimately, Hegel rejects this distinction, and the idea of the “given” in intuition particularly. But in the *Phenomenology* he mainly displays his new-found love of dialectical argument and conscientious paradox, showing the problems which arise with such a distinction. Forms, he points out, can be distinguished without difficulty (the form of a horse versus the form of a rabbit, for example). But contents, distinguished from forms, cannot be distinguished at all, and for much the same reason that sense-certainty, in chapter 1, was incapable of distinguishing particular objects; it could not do so without universals (in this case, forms or concepts). Thus Hegel’s argument, which sounds perverse but has a long history in philosophy, is this; if there is any content at all, there is only one of them, and that is—everything all at once, or “the Absolute.”⁷³

71. One finds a similar play between “inner” and “outer” in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, in his attack on Protagoras, “Man is the measure of all things.”

72. Cf. *Science of Logic*, p. 137f.; *Logic*, para. 133f.

73. The argument should be familiar to most philosophy students as identical to Spinoza’s argument at the beginning of his *Ethics*: if there are any substances, there can

Both of these new distinctions emerge in terms of "force." The first becomes the distinction between "Force proper" and "Force expressed," the former being the activity behind the scenes, the latter being the appearance of force in experience. (In physics, this is the distinction between "potential" and "kinetic" energy.) The distinction between form and content replaces the Aristotelean distinction between substance and properties ("matters") in "Perception," and force now becomes "the movement" between unity and diversity. Here again we see one of Hegel's favorite arguments, the argument that unity is *really* diversity and diversity *really* unity.⁷⁴ (Our primary example of this so far is the three chapters of "Consciousness": the bare "This" as the unity of sense-certainty, the plurality of properties of perception, and now the unity of "The Concept" in understanding.) Force, in other words, *explains change*, though Hegel leaves it intentionally ambiguous to what extent he means change in objects or change in our concepts, since he is arguing that these are ultimately indistinguishable. If we think more concretely about the notion of "force" in Newton's laws, however, it becomes clear that this ambiguity is not just the product of Hegel's philosophical imagination. Newton defines "force" as mass times acceleration. But is force therefore nothing but the quantifiable description of weighable mass and measurable acceleration, and therefore an "appearance"? Or is force rather some unseen power, which explains the relation so measured.⁷⁵ It is easy to appreciate, despite Hegel's impossible language, that he is onto something extremely important, and which still has philosophers of science vigorously arguing today.⁷⁶

The primary examples of force in "Force and the Understanding," however, are not Newton's laws of motion (which were already over a century old) but the newly discovered forces of electromagnetism (152).⁷⁷ The excitement of these discoveries obviously thrilled Schelling (in his *Naturphilosophie*) and Hegel too. The concept of force, and its division into "Force proper" and "Force expressed," is of particular importance in the explanation of electromagnetic phenomena. Take,

at most be one of them. A similar argument has recently been proposed by Donald Davidson, in opposition to the "correspondence theory of truth," namely, that if there are any facts at all, there can be at most one of them (which means that truth cannot be correspondence with "the facts", "True to the Facts," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 66 (1969).)

74. In the *Science of Logic*, the concept of "force" is used to resolve the "contradiction" between the whole and its parts (p. 518ff.).

75. In the *Differenz*-essay of 1801, Hegel writes (of Kant): "attractive and repulsive forces are either purely ideal, in which case they are not force, or else they are transcendent" (p. 164).

76. See, e.g., J. Lakatos and A. Musgrove (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970).

77. In the *Logic*, Hegel insists that these forces are *not mechanical* (136), in order to further stress his differences with Newton.

as the simplest example, the action of a magnet on some iron filings; we talk about the force of the magnet, but are we *really* saying anything more than the fact that the filings behave in a certain way when the magnet is moved? Need we postulate anything “below the surface,” a force, a “field,” as well as describe the various movements of the magnet and the filings? Indeed, this was Leibniz’s objection to Newton too; why postulate some unseen physical force with absurd properties (for example, action at a distance, as in gravitation and magnetism) when one can be content—and *have* just the same “content”—with a thorough redescription of the phenomena without invocation of mysterious causal elements.⁷⁸

Up until this point (and in the *Logic* too) Hegel has been talking about a single force, whose primary property is the unity of objects. (“Force, the self-identical whole, or immanency . . . yet supersedes this immanency and gives itself expression.”⁷⁹) But now, and I think as the result of a logically dubious transition, Hegel shifts from talking about “Force proper” and “Force expressed” (as the power behind the scenes and the actual changes in appearances) to talk about two different *forces* (138–43). It is clear enough what Hegel has in mind: we know it best in Freud, but Hegel takes it from Heraclitus and Empedocles—the view that all change is to be explained by a *conflict of forces* (life against death, sex against ego, love against strife, force against inertia). In his own times, Boscovich challenged Newton by replacing the theory of mass and momentum with a theory of attractive and repulsive forces. The idea seems to be that one force would not have anything to do were there not another force to work against it; “. . . the concept of force becomes *actual* through its duplication into two forces. These two forces exist as independent essences; but their existence is a movement of each towards the other” (141). Hegel’s first example here is electromagnetic theory; the “two forces” are the positive and negative poles of a magnet or a voltage cell. It does not matter which of the two poles is called “positive” and which is called “negative”; they are “indifferent,” Hegel tells us. “Electricity, as simple force, is indifferent to its law—to *be* positive and negative” (152). But the conclusion that Hegel draws from the fact that the labels are arbitrary is that the apparent distinction between forces is “only an empty word.” In a more Newtonian example, he similarly and precociously argues that space and time are mere “moments” of motion (that is, “velocity = distance divided by time”) and therefore not truly distinct (as Einstein would argue a century later, but Leibniz had already suggested it a century before).

78. Cf. Hegel’s own argument in the *Logic* (136).

79. *Ibid.*

In each case, Hegel urges us to raise the same critical question, whether indeed what we are doing when we explain some phenomenon (the movement of the iron filings, the apple dropping to the ground) is *discovering* two forces in opposition below the surface or *postulating* two nonexistent theoretical forces as a convenient way of describing our experience. Thus some modern philosophers of science (e.g. C.G. Hempel) have insisted that all such theoretical constructs, which are a form of explanatory "shorthand," must ultimately be accounted for in terms of some relationship between observable properties, no matter how complex. But then, Hegel says, are we *explaining* anything at all? Are we not just redescribing the phenomenon in greater detail? And if this is so, should we not give up our claim to be discovering forces behind the phenomenon and insist instead that what we have found is only our own activity; "Thus the truth of Force remains only the *thought* of it; the moments of its actuality . . . collapse into an undifferentiated unity, a unity which is not Force driven back into itself . . . but is its *concept qua concept*. Thus the realization of Force is at the same time the loss of reality" (141). In the *Logic*, Hegel says, "every article in the import of force is the same as what is specified in the exertion; and the explanation of the phenomenon by a force is to that extent a mere tautology. [cf. *Phenomenology*, 155]. . . . It is a form that does not make the slightest addition to the content and to the law, which have to be discovered from the phenomenon alone. Another assurance always given is that to speak of forces implies no theory as to their nature; and that being so, it is impossible to see why the form of force has been introduced into the sciences at all" (*ibid.*).⁸⁰

Hegel's argument here against scientific explanation in terms of "force" and "forces" sounds like sophistry, and the almost grotesque obscurity and vagueness of his writing only reinforces this suspicion. But he is onto something of extreme importance, and a look at the history of such "scientific" explanations should make this clear. Molière told the joke about "the sleeping powder causes sleep because of its soporific powers." This looks like an explanation, but it explains nothing. It restates what we already knew, that certain substances cause drowsiness and sleep. But behind the joke lies a lot of philosophy; when Aristotle explained a phenomenon, he appealed to just such inherent forces; in the absence of modern chemical analysis, for example, he had no choice but to explain mind-affecting potions by

80. In the *Logic*, he raises the same objection against explanations in terms of God as force, e.g. in Herder (*ibid.*). As we shall see later, Hegel wholly rejects any conception of God as a mere *explanation* (as he also did in his early "theological" essays. See chapter 3).

reference to their mind-affecting properties. But one might argue that the modern scientist is not in a much better position; he can explain the mind-affecting properties of lysergic acid, for example, by appeal to the fact that the drug resembles certain chemicals in the central nervous system, whose activities it mocks; but if one wants to be perverse, it could be argued that this only pushes back the demand for explanation to another level: *why* do these chemicals have this ability to change consciousness? And the answer at some point seems to be “because they affect the mind.”

Hegel’s argument is partly sophistry; he is not, after all, entirely sympathetic to the scientific enterprise. But what he is demanding here is an account, which philosophers had not yet provided, of the nature of scientific explanation. What he sometimes seems to assume is that such an explanation adds nothing new to what has already been described as the phenomenon to be explained; this assumption can be challenged. In contemporary physics, for instance, progress typically involves the discovery of some new or in any case neglected phenomenon which defies well-established theories—black body radiation or the peculiar behavior of light in certain experiments. And insofar as something new is added, one could argue that scientific explanations are valuable precisely because they incorporate more and more varied phenomena within the same theoretical framework. But even so, the Hegelian challenge can be restated: How is this different from a broader description of the phenomena? And do we inevitably understand more as the scope of description is increased? Many modern physicists have their doubts, and Hegel expressed his doubt a full century before Planck, Einstein, and their colleagues began their total revision of a science that, in 1900, looked as if it had finally explained everything that had to be explained.⁸¹

So far we have been talking primarily of *forces* as explanatory or theoretical postulations behind the scenes; but forces, Hegel reminds us, are still *particulars* (in the *Logic*—“finite”). It is explanation by appeal to force that Hegel calls “a tautological movement” (155) and “a difference that is not a difference” (*ibid.*). The problem Hegel here acknowledges is one that had plagued the concept of scientific explanation ever since (and largely because of) Aristotle—namely, the suspicion that explanation in terms of inherent “forces” or “powers” is no explanation at all. David Hume, for example, had formulated the argument in a striking way in this *Treatise on Human Nature*: “Do we ever actually *experience* such forces?” he challenges. We do not, and

81. Gary Zukov, *Dancing Wu-Li Masters*, in the Introduction.

we must therefore conclude that the alleged "necessity" of cause and effect relations is *in us*, a matter of psychological "habit" rather than physical fact. And just a few years ago, the American philosopher Nelson Goodman reformulated the dilemma again as a series of riddles and paradoxes.⁸² What is the difference between a cause and effect connection and a merely contingent sequence of events? When are we justified in postulating a force at work and a necessary connection between events? How can we escape the "tautology" of a form of explanation that "says nothing at all but repeats the same thing" (155).

The contemporary answer to these questions, anticipated by Hegel in this chapter of the *Phenomenology*, is that explanation requires *laws*. Forces are particular, but laws are general. Postulation of a force seems to redescribe the phenomenon, but the application of a law subsumes the phenomenon under a general pattern of phenomena. The argument has a familiar form; once again Hegel has moved from an ultimately empty reference to particulars to a hopefully rewarding appeal to universals. And once again, he has taken a Kantian turn; whereas forces apparently are powers behind the scenes, laws are contributed to nature *by us*. (Again we find a familiar Hegelian progression, from talk about "the object" to talk about our subjective contribution and "the Concept", as in the shift from the "This" to the "I" in "Sense-Certainty" and the shift from both "Sense-Certainty" and "Perception" to "Force and the Understanding" and "Self-Consciousness".) To explain a phenomenon is to subsume it under a law; but does this reformulation of the scientific enterprise escape the vacuousness Hegel objected to in explanations in terms of "force"? No, Hegel finds, it does not.

To see why explanations in terms of law are also vacuous, we need another criterion, according to which this form of consciousness, which we might today call the "scientific consciousness,"⁸³ must test itself. We have finally satisfied the demand, left over from the first two chapters, that our theory explain how it is that we know particulars; we supply the concepts through which particulars are constituted. But with the concept of "force," which is one ingredient in that constitution, we raise another demand—that an adequate theory of knowledge can in addition account for changes in particulars and interrelations between them. Our previous talk of "things" now turns instead to *events*. Change and relations were part of the "undoing" of perception, and, in general, the greatest single difficulty in Greek philoso-

82. Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977). See also his "Fabrication of Facts" in *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978).

83. Not "Science" in Hegel's broad sense of "*Wissenschaft*."

phy.⁸⁴ Thus Newton's physics and the new mathematics that went along with it, simply construed, were the attempt to provide laws of change.⁸⁵ The calculus provided mathematical descriptions of seemingly irregular and infinitesimal processes, and Newton's laws reduced all physical motion to a simple set of forces, actions and reactions. The new criterion, in other words, was the demand that we account for change in the simplest possible set of laws, and these laws, unlike the changes they explain, are permanent, "the stable image of unstable appearance" (149). Thus we find even in Einstein the insistence that though the universe may be constantly changing, the laws, at least, are eternal.

If laws are to be enduring and not, like the concept of force, too specific to the phenomena they explain and *ad hoc*, they must be as broad as possible. Ideally, therefore, there would be only *one* law, and it would not be inaccurate to say that this is still the criterion for scientific progress—the "unity of science" and the explanation of all phenomena under the simplest set of laws. Thus Newton died seeking a synthesis between his laws of motion and his still problematic theory of gravitation, and Einstein died still looking for a "unified field theory," which would organize all of the explanatory forces of physics, including electromagnetism and gravity as well as intra-atomic forces, under a single set of laws. But this is just what Hegel insists is impossible.

As an advance on Newton, scientists of the 18th century had attempted to reduce his various laws to one, just as the philosophers following Kant tried to "systematize" his philosophy. It is this attempt at the unity of all laws that leads Hegel to insist, in this chapter, that

... plurality is a defect, for it contradicts the principle of the Understanding for which, as consciousness of the simple inner world [of laws], the True is the implicitly universal *unity*. It must, therefore, let many laws collapse into one law (150).

The reasoning here is something like this; if there were more than one law, there would have to be a further law explaining the relationship between laws, their priorities and interconnections. Thus Spinoza had argued that there could only be one substance, and Aristotle

84. One of Aristotle's main objections against Plato was his inability to account for change. So too Parmenides and his student Zeno attacked the very notion of change as nonsense. Heraclitus, who tried to say that change was real, had to bolster up that notion with the idea of an eternal and unchanging *logos* to explain change as a manifestation of something unchanging, as its basis.

85. At Jena and later at Nürnberg, Hegel would give courses on differential and integral calculus. But in Germany, Leibniz was generally given credit for these inventions, not Newton.

attacked Plato on the basis of "the third man argument," namely, that to show the relation between the Form "Man" and a man one would need another Form, and then another to explain *that* relationship, and so on *ad infinitum*. In fact, such a single all-inclusive law had been ingeniously formulated by the physicist Boscovich in the middle of the 18th century; much of Hegel's argument, therefore, is directed toward the lively scientific enterprise of his own day.⁸⁶

The problem with such general laws is that they lose the explanatory richness of rather specific laws (for instance, Lavoisier's law of oxidation, which brought together the disparate phenomena of breathing, rusting, and burning); they "lose their specific character . . . become more and more superficial" and ultimately become "nothing but the concept of law itself" (150). Hegel picks out the law of gravitation as such an empty law, but adds that "the expression, *universal attraction*, is of great importance insofar as it is directed against the thoughtless way in which everything is pictured as contingent" (ibid.). But Hegel poses a new dilemma, that either laws are so specific that they too, like the appeal to "force," become nonexplanatory, or they become so general and "superficial" that they are ultimately empty and explain nothing at all. The dilemma is not real, one could argue, for there still remains that vast range of middle-level laws which Hegel has not challenged as such. But there will always be the tendency and temptation Hegel warns us, to insist on all-embracing laws. What he is attacking, then, is not science as such (which he found fascinating) but the perennial scientific pretense to incorporate *everything* within its domain, to reduce every phenomenon to forces and matters in motion and universal laws of attraction and repulsion. Hegel does point out a serious problem regarding even the middle-level laws, however; it is a problem also to be found in Kant and will later form the basis of Hegel's attack on Kant's ethics too. The problem is how to apply a law, which is universal, to any particular phenomenon (150, 154). The law cannot change to suit particular cases, but how else can it be made to "fit?" Kant suggests a complex system of schemata which Hegel calls "a scandal" [in the *Logic*] and "bones and sticks tied by string." The danger here is that, if laws are to be applicable to partic-

86. Roger Boscovich developed this theory in his *Theory of Natural Philosophy* (1758). James Ogilvy has argued in admirable detail the extent to which Hegel's arguments in "Force and the Understanding" are aimed directly at showing how Boscovich's single law—just because it was all-encompassing, explained nothing at all. This too is warning about Hegel's ultimate attitude toward the "Absolute"; insofar as it is everything, it is ultimately nothing. Reality consists in distinctions, forms, and particulars, not in the all-inclusive universal. Thus Heidegger's view of Hegel as the last defender of *logos* turns out to be false—at least in the *PG*.

ular phenomena, they will have to be made more and more specific, and thus run the risk of triviality because they are no longer general enough to “add anything to the phenomenon.”

Understanding has this urge to absolute unity and total comprehension, but it cannot achieve this, according to Hegel, and as it tries to become absolute, it pushes itself to greater absurdities. Either it finds itself simply repeating the descriptions of the phenomena that are to be comprehended or it proposes laws that are so general that they no longer explain anything. How does scientific explanation avoid these problems?—by postulating a world behind the scenes, a “supersensible world” which the scientist knows but we (ordinary *Volk*) do not. Thus scientists talk about forces and atoms and gravity and genes and charges and ions and potentials to explain various phenomena. But what is the status of these new entities? Have scientists in fact *discovered* them? Or are they nothing but theoretical postulates, projections of the scientific understanding? In more Hegelian terms, is this “supersensible world” a world of laws and forces behind the phenomena?—or is it rather a world *within us*, as in Leibniz and Kant, ultimately explicable in terms of the activities of consciousness? Here in the *Phenomenology* and again in the *Logic*, Hegel plays with this distinction between “outer” and “inner,” raising paradoxes and bringing about contradictions as understanding tries to account for the “supersensible world” it has allegedly “discovered.” But here the dialectic takes its most dramatic turn so far, for as soon as one tries to talk about the world beyond experience, as Kant had demonstrated so effectively in his antinomies, one runs into contradictions. Then we face two equally absurd alternatives: either we have to appeal to a “real world,” “in itself,” behind and beyond our experiences, or we have to admit that the world itself is contradictory. With this paradox, Hegel leads us into one of the most fascinating forms in his entire philosophy—the so-called “inverted world,” which culminates his general attack on Kant’s still too conservative epistemology, on the “thing in itself,” and on the entire scientific enterprise, insofar as it claims to give us an account of a scientific Reality behind the scenes.

e. The Inverted World: The World as Contradiction

Transcendental idealism, carried more consistently to its logical conclusion, has recognized the emptiness of that specter of the *thing-in-itself* which the critical philosophy had left over—an abstract shadow, detached from all content—and had it in view to demolish it altogether. —Hegel, *Science of Logic*

In "Force and Understanding," we are introduced to "the supersensible world," the world "behind the scenes." To any philosophy student the phrase "supersensible world" refers us back to Plato. In his most dramatic parable, Plato in the *Republic* tells the story of prisoners in a cave, who see only shadows; but reality ("the World of Being," the realm of "Forms") which casts those shadows is beyond them, beyond the mere shadows (the "phenomena") of daily experience. Why is the world of Forms more "real" than our day-to-day world? Because it is eternal, because it does not change. And this idea—that reality does not change—has reigned supreme throughout philosophy, from the very first philosophers in Greece to modern times. Philosophers have defined "substance," for example, as that which underlies changes in things—a classic Aristotelean definition. In modern science too, the idea of unchanging laws, which explain changes in events, has reigned supreme, even underlying much of relativity theory. Later, in his *Logic*, and sometimes in the *Phenomenology* too, Hegel joins this ancient tradition and speaks of "eternal Truth," but here, at least, in the section of chapter 3 which deals with "the inverted world" (*die verkehrte Welt*, paras. 157–65), he is one of those few radical thinkers who turns the whole of Western thought upside-down.

Verkehrte means upside-down, "topsy-turvy," or *inverted*; but it also means distorted, *perverse*.⁸⁷ The theme of the section can be simply stated; the supersensible world of laws which we have been discussing becomes a second supersensible world—the inverted world—in which everything is the "opposite" of what it is: black is white, up is down, left is right. If we refer back to Plato's famous parable, we can see the familiar Hegelian twist; the supposedly "real" world of Forms turns out not to be real at all; indeed, what is real is the fact that there are no eternal forms, which Hegel expresses as the idea that "we have to think pure change" (160). If we think instead of the "supersensible world" as the world postulated by science to explain phenomena, we can formulate a similar twist—that there is no world of "tranquil laws," because laws change too, with phenomena. In fact, there is *no way the world is*, since as we change our concepts, we change both the laws and the world. The Absolute is not static but dynamic. The world gives rise to "contradictions" (*Widerspruch*). (This is the first discussion of this word). The world of the understanding, the metaphysical pretension of science, is shown to give rise to consequences which, by its own standards, it must find intolerable.

The supersensible world that most occupies Hegel here, however, is neither Plato's world of Forms nor the scientific realm of laws, but

87. Hegel had used the expression "*verkehrte Welt*" in 1801 (in the *CJP*) to chastise philosophers who invoked an unknowable world behind the scenes, Kant in particular.

Kant's residual conception of "the thing-in-itself." We have seen that Hegel, following Kant, insists on the importance of what he calls "the unconditioned universal," which we have interpreted as a priori concepts, which precede, rather than abstract from, the empirical details of experience. But the concepts of the understanding are not, after all, "unconditioned" for Kant; they are "conditioned" by our conceptual apparatus, and their number is "fixed" at twelve.⁸⁸ But what Hegel really has in mind here is contrasting the understanding, which is so "conditioned," with the faculty of Reason, which is "unconditioned."⁸⁹ But what this means is not just that Reason is free to change its concepts as Understanding is not; it also means that Reason, unlike Understanding, deals with what Hegel unfortunately calls "the Infinite." (He borrowed the term from Schelling and Jacobi.) The "infinite," however, just means "the world in itself," which is precisely what Kant denied to us as an object of knowledge. The supersensible world is "infinite" in a bad sense just because it is *beyond* us; it is "in itself" but not "for us".⁹⁰ And Hegel's move here is to deny "the thing in itself" and Kant's distinction between "appearance" (*phenomenon*, "the world as it is for another") and "in itself" (or *noumenon*, "the world as it is for itself")⁹¹. Against Kant, Hegel wants to insist that there is no supersensible world, that the world of phenomena and the noumenal world are one and the same, or "in and for itself," "in itself" and "for us." But understanding, because it insists (that is, Kant insists) that it is a "fixed" apparatus which is related to something "outside" of it, cannot be self-contained and cannot reflect on its own adequacy (as reason can). It cannot be "infinite," that is, "the absolute unrest of pure self-movement" (163); it refers to a world beyond itself, which it cannot know.

Kant's view of the "thing-in-itself" is far more complicated than the "supersensible world" of science, however. On the one hand, there is the supersensible world, the "tranquil kingdom of laws," projected by

88. Kant admits in the first *Critique* that he took over his list of categories from the psychologists of the day. Fichte thus accuses him of failing to be "systematic" and "deducing" his categories, and Hegel complains in the *Logic* (§42) that Kant was completely "uncritical" and put them together "like a shopping list." Regarding Hegel's general resistance to "fixed" numbers, recall his argument against Christ's apostles (also fixed at 12) in his early Positivity-essay.

89. *Logic*, 45.

90. The allusion to the "bad" infinite is drawn from Hegel's *Logic* (§94). The bad infinite is a "negative" or a "mere beyond"; thus mathematical infinity (before Kantor at the end of the century) is defined as an endless progression; the "genuine" infinity, on the other hand, is defined as self-containment, and this is the way Hegel uses this term in the *PG*.

91. Note again the inconsistent use of these terms. Kant refers to the "noumenon" as "in itself"; Hegel is being perverse.

the understanding, and Kant sometimes suggests (in the first and in the third *Critiques*) that the "thing-in-itself" is just such a projection too. But then on the other hand, Kant sometimes insists that the world "in itself" is the *real* world, intelligible through practical reason rather than understanding. This ambiguity is compounded by the fact that Kant systematically tries to make the two equivalent, moving with remarkable ease between the view that the thing-in-itself is really "in us" (as "the self in itself"—the position picked up by Fichte and Schelling) and the view that the thing-in-itself is really "out there," not an object of knowledge (except for God) but rather the true "unconditioned" (or Absolute)—which Jacobi claimed to intuit, beyond the understanding.⁹² In this section, Hegel plays on all this confusion by referring to *two* supersensible worlds, which play themselves off against each other (157).

I do not want this almost unreadable section to seem more lucid than it is. Indeed, the beginning is so rough one almost wonders whether the printer left out a few lines or so. But this much is clear, the "first supersensible world" is "the tranquil kingdom of laws" which is "the immediate copy of the perceived world" (157). Notice the deliberate play on Plato here; the supersensible world is a copy of appearances, rather than the other way around. (This is already *verkehrt*.) The "second supersensible world" is the inverted world, which Hegel tells us "is already present in the "first supersensible world" and moreover "is completed as appearance" of the first world, of which it is the inversion (*ibid.*). Hegel goes on to say that the first world "had its necessary counterpart in this perceived world which still retained *for itself the principle of change and alteration*. The first kingdom of laws lacked that principle, but obtains it as an inverted world" (*ibid.*).

Now what are we to make of this? One suggestion⁹³ is that here Hegel is making his move against Plato, à la Aristotle, insisting not only that the world of appearance is the real world, but insisting too, what Aristotle at least suggested, that *reality is change*. In the view of understanding, the truth must be supersensible, for while appearances change, the laws that explain those appearances stay constant. What Hegel is now starting to argue is that the laws, as projections "beyond" a changing reality, have to change too. Thus the first supersensible world, which was postulated to explain change (or, in Plato, Parmenides, and many Greek Philosophers, to dismiss change as not

92. Cf. *Logic*, 62. On "The Central Role of the Thing-In-Itself in Kant," see J. N. Findlay, *Philosophical Forum*, vol. XIII, no. 1 (Fall, 1981) pp. 51–65.

93. Hans Gadamer, "Hegel's Inverted World," in *Hegel's Dialectic* (Tubingen, 1971); in English, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), p. 44.

wholly "real") "lacked a principle of change" for itself, which was "still retained by the perceived world." The inverted world, on this account, is "a reversal of ontological emphasis,"⁹⁴ a reminder of the fact overlooked by metaphysicians and scientists alike that the world is not imperfect just because it never conforms exactly to their theories.

This in itself would be persuasive, if flimsily argued, but it is clear that Hegel wants to go much further than this; the second supersensible world, the inversion of the first, is *real*. What could this possibly mean? Two suggestions have been prominent in the literature; one is the idea that the inverted world offers us an intentionally ridiculous counter-example to Kant's notion of the "thing-in-itself".⁹⁵ The other suggestion is that the inverted world actually makes the point that the real world is itself contradictory.⁹⁶ I now think that a better interpretation includes both of these—but first let us consider the merits of each in its turn.

If one postulates a supersensible world to explain the things and events of the world we perceive, what must this world be like? The most obvious suggestion is that it must contain properties and principles which will explain the order we perceive in the sensible world. But this is not so. Kant argues that the very nature of the case is such that we cannot know and have no reason to suppose that the properties of the thing-in-itself are anything like the properties we perceive in things. Not only Kant but Berkeley and Hume too had argued against Locke that, once one has postulated objects beyond experience which cause our sensations, one has no justification whatever in supposing that the objects which are the causes will be anything like the objects which are inferred from the effects. In other words, it might be that the things-in-themselves which cause us to see red are themselves green, or no color at all. It is possible that electromagnetic forces "in themselves" might be forces of a very different kind, perhaps just one more deception provided for us by the evil demon that Descartes supposed was causing all kinds of false beliefs

94. Ibid. 45. Robert Zimmerman has expanded on this idea that Hegel is here defending Aristotle against Plato, in his "Hegel's 'Inverted World' Revisited," *Philosophical Forum*, vol. XIII, no. 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 342–70.

95. For example, Joseph C. Flay, "Hegel's Inverted World," in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. XXIII, no. 4 (June 1970), pp. 662–78. I argued a similar thesis in my *From Rationalism to Existentialism* (1972), p. 59. It is implied, I think, by Findlay's short discussion in his *Hegel*, p. 92 ("the extremely queer, arbitrary fantasy of an inverted world . . .").

96. The best development of this view is Jay Ogilvy's *Reading Hegel* (unpublished, 1974). Julius Sensat has argued it persuasively, and Gadamer at least anticipates it. Engels, of course, swallowed it straight in his "dialectical materialism."

in us. In the inverted world, sweet things are sour,⁹⁷ and pleasure is pain. Reward is punishment, and law is crime.⁹⁸ Taken literally, this is nonsense, but that is just what it is intended to be, for this is a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against any notion of a supersensible world; if it is the same as the sensible world, we don't need it. (This was Aristotle's argument against Plato's world of the Forms.) And if it is different from the sensible world, it makes no sense. (This led to Plato's own reservation about his theory and the so-called "third man" argument.) In either case, we have no need of a world beyond appearances, and this conclusion follows directly from everything else that Hegel has been arguing in this chapter.

The need for a second interpretation arises because of Hegel's mode of expression, his insistence that the second supersensible world, the inverted world, is the "completion" of appearance (157) and is not only "an inverted *actual world*," but in some sense "the perceived world" (159). Hegel argues that one cannot, because of what we have already argued, accept so simple a distinction as "inner" and "outer," "appearance and the supersensible, as of two different kinds of actuality" (*ibid.*). So there is a sense in which "sourness which would be the in-itself of the sweet thing is actually a thing just as much as the latter, *viz.* a sour thing; black, which would be the in-itself of white, is an actual black," and so on. This sounds absurd, but, on this second interpretation, it is not. The principle of the inverted world (given in 156) is this;

... the difference exhibits itself as difference of the *thing itself* or as absolute difference, and this difference of the *thing* is thus nothing else but the selfsame that has repelled itself from itself, and therefore merely posits an antithesis which is none.

It is not a model of clarity, I grant you, but the point can be stated: there are no distinctions or divisions in the world as such (the Abso-

97. The example and discussion come from the *Theaetetus* (1606):

SOCRATES: ... in accordance with the account we accepted earlier, agent and patient give birth to sweetness and a sensation, both movements that pass simultaneously. The sensation, on the patient's side, makes the tongue percipient, while, on the side of the wine, the sweetness, moving in the region of the wine, causes it both to be and to appear sweet to the healthy tongue.

SOCRATES: Rather, when I become percipient, I must become percipient of *something*, for I cannot have a perception and have it of nothing, and equally the object, when it becomes sweet or sour and so on, must become so to *someone*—it cannot become sweet and yet sweet to nobody.

98. The reference is most immediately to Kant, for whom the law is "intelligible" and the punishment "sensible." In Hegel's early essays, particularly his essay on "Natural Law," he objected to Kant—following Fichte and Schelling—on the basis of the absurdities that this separation generated in any attempt to develop a theory of law and of citizens treated as rational subjects, not "objects" (coerced by the threat of punishment). See my discussion in Chapter 3, "The Professional Years."

lute), but rather all distinctions and divisions, all “differences” are made through conceptualization. Hegel often uses the phrase “the selfsame that has repelled itself from itself”, and also “a difference that is no difference” to refer to the idea that a contrast is made by us rather than in the thing-itself as such, and this means that there is a sense in which opposites are mutually necessary; we could not pick out colors if we had only one color; we could not have a concept of light without a concept of dark, or north without south, or left without right. To say that the world is contradictory, on this account, is therefore to say something rather tame; it is to say that the world consists of distinctions and one could not have one side without the other. One could not have a concept of crime without a concept of punishment. (This is like the British quip about the only sure way of stopping crime is to repeal the laws.) It is through distinctions that the world acquires its form, and it is through these distinctions that change in the world is possible,—for where there are no distinctions, there is nothing to change. (A formless mass remains formless; changes in it don’t count as changes.) But to call the world “contradictory,” or “antithesis within antithesis” is an extravagant way of pointing this out.⁹⁹

There is a further argument here, however, which Hegel himself seems only to indicate, and it is here that the inverted world takes on a profound significance in the *Phenomenology* and in philosophy in general. Not only is Hegel arguing that reality is essentially change (along with Heraclitus and Aristotle and against Parmenides and Plato) and that there is no “supersensible world” (along with Fichte and against Kant) and that distinctions in the world are made by us and inevitably in opposition; he is also arguing, in a hands-down no-holds-barred attack on what he calls “finite thinking”—mere understanding—that the world itself is genuinely contradictory.¹⁰⁰ This will horrify every

99. Gadamer rather charmingly comments at this point that “Hegel is a Schwabian, and startling people is his passion, just as it is the passion of all Schwabians” (p. 37). This might sound oddly *ad hominem* to English ears, but it is not uncommon in the German literature—particularly in reference to Hölderlin (also a Schwabian), since poets are apparently less immune to *ad hominem* accounts of their conceptual behavior. See, for example, Michael Hamburger, *Reason and Energy*, ch. 1. On the role of our expectations and concepts in the phenomenology of change, see Jean-Paul Sartre’s discussion of “destruction” in the chapter on “Negation” in *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

100. It has become one of the bromides of Hegel criticism that Hegel rejects the law of non-contradiction. Thus Eduard Von Hartmann argues that the dialectic is just this, and Richard Kroner praises Hegel as “the greatest irrationalist in the history of philosophy.” Jay Ogilvy protects Hegel by distinguishing between logical contradiction and “dialectical contradiction” (p. 273ff.) and interprets the inverted world section according to the latter. He thus rejects Flay’s (and my) *reductio ad absurdum* interpretation on the grounds that “Hegel does not use such indirect arguments” (275) and “*reductio*

logician since Aristotle, of course, but Hegel does not have in mind the logically absurd proposal that both P and $\text{not-}P$ are true in the same sense and in the same context. Hegel too sees outright contradiction as intolerable, and it is because of contradiction and lesser difficulties that the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* moves from form to form. But Hegel, unlike Kant and many contemporary logicians, does not see contradiction as a mere dead-end, an end of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument from which one must either reject the premises ("indeterminate negation") or, as Karl Popper unfairly argued against Hegel in his *Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), accept it as an absurdity from which anything follows. The topic here alluded to, but not actually discussed, is Kant's *antinomies*. But Hegel does discuss them in his *Logic*, and there we can quickly find the tools to turn the inverted world of the *Phenomenology* into a considerable challenge not only to Kant's philosophy in the first *Critique* (that is, insofar as Kant still believed in the thing-in-itself and the limitation of knowledge to understanding) but to the very idea of the autonomy of knowledge and the independence of science.

The argument, which we have already anticipated, is this; Kant argued that pairs of contradictory principles could be validly derived whenever we try to ascertain the nature of the thing-in-itself, the "unknown x " beyond our experiences. These are the antinomies. But Kant's claim has to be broken into two parts, one the possibility of knowing the thing-in-itself, the other the possibility of knowing anything beyond our experiences. According to Hegel, the world we experience *is* the thing-in-itself, the Absolute, and there is nothing to know or even imagine beyond the realm of experience. This means that the antinomies must be given a very different interpretation; as arguments about the world beyond our experience, they are indeed nonsense. But as arguments about the world of our experience, they are not to be taken as nonsense at all, nor as the "illusions" that Kant considered them; they are rather an important clue about the nature

arguments presuppose the untruth of contradiction" (276). Ogilvy argues that things are not always as they appear, but this is not to say that there is a world beyond appearance. So far, so good. But then he also argues that "there is a sense in which x , which appears to be a , can only be understood as a to the extent that it is also determined by the opposite of a or a^* . But in what sense can we then say that x is a^* ?—and it is here that I think the second interpretation takes advantage of Hegel's own misstatement; to say that x is a by way of contrast to a^* is in no sense to say that x is a^* . Gadamer, on the other hand, presents the section as a satire, in which the inversion of the (first) supersensible world by the second is in turn an inversion of itself as appearance. Ogilvy responds that a^* is not the same as negation ("not- a ") and so " $(a/a^*)^*$ " is not necessarily a logical contradiction, but this is still a "difficulty" sufficient for Hegel to conclude what everyone agrees that he concludes, that understanding as such is an inadequate vehicle of knowledge.

of reality, the nature of the Absolute. The clue is this; that different concepts and different arguments give us different views of the world. Consider, for instance, Kant's third antinomy;

Thesis: there are in the world causes through freedom [i.e. free actions].

Antithesis: there is no freedom, but only natural causes.

Both are provable, and in fact, Kant accepts them both (the first as true of the world-in-itself, the second as true of phenomena). They provide very different views of the world, but Hegel, unlike Kant, is staunchly unwilling to distinguish two worlds for them to be true of, respectively. Thus both must be true, if Kant is right, of the same world, a world that is, therefore, contradictory.

This is a paradox. It is not, as Marx and Engels seemed to think, the most important result of Hegel's argument; it is rather one more difficulty to be overcome. If Hegel believed in a world-in-itself against which we could match our various conceptions, we could decide (in theory at least) which one is correct. But there is no world apart from our conceptions of it. If there were different worlds, for different views to be true of, then the contradiction would be resolved (for example, the way that "all men are selfish" is a good premise to use in a poker game but a falsehood at a Quaker meeting). But there is but one world, no matter how fragmented it may be (and, in any case, the fragmentation, according not only to Hegel but the whole of his generation—Schiller and Hölderlin particularly—is *our* doing.) The question is, How are these contradictory fragments to be seen together? This is a question that Kant does not answer, at least, not in his first *Critique*.

The fault, Hegel concludes, lies with the understanding itself, which dogmatically insists that there is but a single set of categories for knowledge which are *a priori* valid independently of any other considerations. To say that the world itself is contradictory is not to say that propositions of the form "*p* and *not-p*" are true. It is rather to say that idealism has come to terms with the idea that different conceptions of the way the world *really* is might be equally compatible with the evidence and equally logical, even if they are contradictory. There is no "way the world really is" against which we can compare and *choose between* them.

This, I take it, is what one might insert, in the spirit if not the letter of Hegel, as the final argument of "Force and the Understanding," that the inverted world is an argument not only against the thing-in-itself and the idea of a supersensible world—which it is—and not only to the extent to which we create rather than find the distinctions

between things—which it also is; it is a resounding declaration against “dogmatism,” as opposed to “speculation” (*Phenomenology* 54f.; *Logic*, 32). Dogmatism approaches the world with fixed categories; speculation is flexible enough to adjust its concepts as it changes through experience. Dogmatism tells us what *must* be behind “the curtain to the inner world”; speculative Hegel tells us, “let us instead go behind that curtain ourselves” (paraphrase of 165).¹⁰¹ The *truth* of consciousness is not to be found in the facts of the world, in sweet and sour, black and white, north and south, etc.; it is to be found rather in the nature of consciousness itself, its *self*. It is the self that is behind the curtain, and what we have done so far is worry too much about what is merely “objective”; that is, what knowledge is *about*. At this point, a very different set of questions comes to the fore, no longer by way of a quest for a theory of knowledge but rather for an account of the self that has that knowledge. That self is not, like Kant’s “transcendental ego,” a purely knowing self; it is, first of all, a biological creature, a human being engaged in trying to make his or her way in the world. The world of knowledge is not a dead world of “objects”; it is a world of conscious, active, passionate, and thinking beings. And insofar as the world is to be understood in terms of some underlying “inner” dynamic, the key term cannot be Newton’s physical concept of “force” but rather the biological concept of “*Life*”, the animism of the cosmos which had defined so much of German philosophy and poetry from Leibniz and the Gothic mystics to Fichte, Schelling, and Hölderlin.

*f. Knowledge and Desire: Hegel’s Pragmatic Turn
(the first pages of chapter 4)*

I exist not as transcendental subject . . . but as a concrete subject in contact with a real world, and in such a way that comprehension is like a personal victory; Eureka! —Mikel Dufrenne

Hegel ends the chapter on “Force and the Understanding” with the paradoxical invitation that we “go behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world,” but only by giving up understanding and its limitations and starting a “more complex movement,” namely, “of what consciousness knows in knowing itself” (165). This should not surprise anyone who is familiar with Kant; knowledge of self, for Kant—self not as abstract “transcendental ego” but

¹⁰¹ The “curtain” metaphor, presumably, refers to the “veil of Maya” of the Oriental mystics.

self as a rational agent in the world—is knowledge of things in themselves, not mere appearances. Kant believes, though he would not have put it this way, that our contact with the world-in-itself, not as mere appearance or phenomenon, is primarily *practical*.

So far, we have taken the “subject”—the “I” that *has* knowledge, confronts the object, sorts our properties, contributes concepts—entirely for granted. It is an observational “I,” a mere spectator, even when it provides the regal activity of bestowing concepts on that which it watches (like a judge issuing orders while sitting on his bench). But this is a false view of self, a faulty view of our roles in the world, and an inadequate view of knowledge. We saw this in the previous section when we watched Hegel pursue some precocious ideas which seemed to result in the paradoxes of pure knowing; something was ultimately left out, namely, a criterion that would allow us to choose between alternative theoretical frameworks and would lead us to prefer one view of the world over others. It is the understanding’s own criterion for adequacy that it must choose only one theory as “true,” the way the world *really* is. What was left out, we can now suggest—by way of still another hypothesis about knowledge—was an account of the self and its *interests*.¹⁰²

Knowledge doesn’t come in a vacuum. Even in a laboratory or a seminar room (as close as one can come to a vacuum sometimes), one has a reputation at stake, or one is concerned about the opinions of others; one wants one’s work to be recognized, one has previous intellectual debts and commitments to be honored, positions already on record, theories vehemently defended, antagonists to be defeated, friends to be complimented, deficiencies in information to be protected, clever arguments ready to be presented at the slightest instigation, limited equipment, a clumsy assistant who is not to be trusted, an important visitor to be impressed, a childhood prejudice that has not been overcome, a bad experience in graduate school, a grant pending before the National Science Foundation, the possibility of an offer from Stanford and, not least, one’s pride, one’s sense of independence as a scientist or scholar, one’s sense of conquest in discovery, one’s sense of possessiveness when that discovery is “mine!” (“Eureka!” shouted Archimedes in his bathtub, providing the model for scientific discovery ever since.)

One might argue that scientists and science are to be “purified” of such tangential and merely personal motives in favor of the pure im-

102. This point has been developed in particular by Jürgen Habermas in his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, particularly in ch. 1, “Hegel’s Critique of Kant,” and ch. 9, “Reason and Interest: Retrospect on Kant and Fichte” (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

personal motives of the seeker after truth, the detached observer, the selfless experimenter, but this is not so simple as it seems. In fact, it is recently respectable to argue that even these supposedly pure and impersonal factors are wholly grounded in the personality of the scientist, and in any case, there are few theoretical contexts—even in the bowels of science—which are even plausibly purified from personal and practical considerations.¹⁰³ Thus we have an unprecedented number of recent debates about the *responsibilities* of science, and it is now an almost unchallengeable assertion that science never operates in a social vacuum, that knowledge always must consider its practical ramifications and consequences.

But this is, after all, a rather tame argument. It leaves Kant's separation of knowledge and action unchallenged; it demands only that one pursue the first with an eye to the second. Hegel's argument is much more radical,—and he gets it primarily from Fichte. The argument is that one *cannot* have knowledge without consideration of its practical and personal context. Hegel begins to demonstrate this, using Kant's antinomies as his starting point, in the "Inverted World" section of chapter 3; namely, if only theoretical factors are considered—that is, evidence and inferences, hypotheses and questions of consistency, coherence, and simplicity—any phenomenon or set of phenomena can be explained by several radically different hypotheses, each of which takes into account *all* of the evidence and satisfies the other criteria for adequacy too. The proof of this is quite simple (one finds it in a different context in Descartes); through any number of finite points, any number of lines can be drawn. So too, given any finite collection of evidence, any number (but let us just say "several") hypotheses can be made to fit. What can we use to choose between them, since we have already used all our theoretical considerations in their formulation? Some philosophers at this point—notably Thomas Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*¹⁰⁴—have argued that it is a matter of fashion, what counts at the time as "normal science." Thus Copernicus and Newton ultimately toppled Ptolemy and Aristotle because their ideas had found their time. But this is clearly insufficient; what is left out are all those factors that scientists and many philosophers of science refuse to acknowledge, except negatively. Scientific theory is shaped not just by fashion but by the whole temperament of the time—metaphysical prejudices, moral commitments, religious

103. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

104. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. See also Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* and, for an even more radical version of this thesis, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978).

faith and doctrines, one's sense of communication with or alienation from nature, as well as what will satisfy the ego of the individual scientist and give him or her the recognition craved, no matter how hesitantly.¹⁰⁵

It is perhaps the single-most important transition in the *Phenomenology* that takes us from "Force and the Understanding" to "Self-Consciousness," for as Hegel tells us, "with self-consciousness, we have therefore entered the native realm of truth" (166). The argument, as always, takes two steps, one of which we have already discussed in detail. That is, first Hegel must show us that the first form of consciousness, the understanding, breaks down according to its own internal difficulties. (In fact, the form itself contains a number of different moves, each of which has this same two-step form: (1) hypothesis to breakdown, (2) positing of a new hypothesis.) The breakdown in understanding, simply stated, is that it cannot do what it claims to be able to do—give us a view of knowledge which will not only account for our identification of particular objects (which it does) but also account for changes and relations between objects, *explain* these in a *single, all-embracing theory which is uniquely true, "the way the world really is."* Instead, we find a series of tautologies and metaphysical pretensions which, when pushed, emerge not in a single theory but in contradictory theories, equally valid. Even if some of Hegel's objections to science are dubious, to say the least, the force of his over-all argument is considerable; we are led to "*aufheben*" the claims of understanding and the detached view of science and invited to look at something quite different, the knowing self and the personal, practical parameters of knowledge.

Again, it must be pointed out that there is no *necessity* of giving up understanding; after Hegel, there will still be scientists, just as dedicated to their work as before. But they must live with the "contradictions" that science (not Hegel) has produced for itself; they can do so, and they can rationalize them in any of a hundred ways. The contradiction Hegel has shown us here is not a logical absurdity, in the sense

105. This argument is easily twisted into the objection that it is an excuse for scientists to give up the "integrity of their subject" and all "scientific standards" and to claim and publish whatever is in tune with the times and will give them recognition. But in discussing the importance of personal and practical considerations, we are already *assuming* compliance with the canons of rigor, that the hypothesis is reasonable and consistent, the apparatus clean, and the experiment actually carried out successfully. The question then is, given equal competence and integrity in a Papuan witch doctor and Dr. Salk, each of them with a hypothesis about the causes and cures of a still uncontrolled disease, what grounds are there for choosing between them? This is emphatically *not* an argument that quacks and charlatans, if they succeed in gaining recognition, are thereby successful in their pursuit of knowledge.

that it entails that we *must* give up the search for a single all-embracing theory of the world, in which consciousness itself does not play an essential role, as an unintelligible pursuit. It is only a powerful argument that we ought to do so, that if we are looking for Truth writ large, science and understanding are probably not where to find it. Perhaps we should also point out the dominance of the *physical* sciences in these chapters, chapter 3 especially, and one might well argue that Hegel's arguments here are intended primarily against *New-tonian* science, explanations in terms of forces and general laws. There are other sciences which operate with a very different set of procedures and considerations (we shall discuss them in the following section in our discussion of Hegel's chapter 5 sec. A).¹⁰⁶

The argument for the practical dimensions of knowledge had already been anticipated in Hegel's marvelous but misplaced comment in chapter 1:

Even animals are not shut out from this wisdom but, on the contrary, show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into it; for they do not just stand idly in front of things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up. (*Phenomenology*, 109)

The point can be made that animals know things too, but the suggestion that such knowledge is merely observational, a search for the best explanation or a detached attempt to formulate a single all-embracing theory, is obviously nonsense. (In chapter 1, Hegel's point was the perishability of particulars). Not only in animals but for us too, knowledge is primarily practical. Perhaps the best argument for this thesis in recent times is Martin Heidegger's protracted discussion in *Being and Time*. Arguing against his teacher, Edmund Husserl, who held an unabashedly theoretical view of consciousness (with mathematics his primary interest), Heidegger suggested instead that our "natural viewpoint in the world" is not as observer but as *being-there* ("*dasein*"), and the entities we come to know are not "Things" (as in Hegel's chapter 2) but rather *tools* and *instruments*, with which we can *do* things and satisfy our desires.

106. By way of anticipation, one might contrast explanations of human behavior which are self-consciously "mechanical" in their methods, insisting upon "operational" definitions and variables which can be measured by an "outside" observer—B.F. Skinner's behaviorism, for example, with accounts of human behavior that make essential appeal to "inner" variables such as desires and purposes and the intentions and outlook of the subject—in recent "humanist" and "existential" psychology, for example. Charles Taylor puts considerable stress on this aspect of Hegel's thinking in both of his Hegel books, following up his now classic defense of teleology in the human sciences in *The Purpose of Behavior* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965).

The phenomenon of Being-in has for the most part been represented exclusively by a single exemplar—knowing the world . . . even practical behavior has been understood as “non-theoretical.”¹⁰⁷

Heidegger characterizes our “primordial” attitude toward the world as *concern* (*Besorge*) and the entities we come to know not as things but as “equipment”:

We shall call these entities which we encounter in concern “equipment” . . . every entity of this kind is not grasped thematically (that is, known theoretically), nor is the equipment structure known as such in the using of it. The hammerer does not simply have knowledge about the hammer’s character as equipment, but has appropriated this equipment . . . the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly it is encountered as that which it is—as equipment.¹⁰⁸

It might seem odd to quote Heidegger—who is not known for his clarity—in explaining Hegel, but Hegel is impossibly obscure in the first few pages of chapter 4, so much so that even the best commentators sometimes prefer to view these paragraphs (166–77) as a mere preliminary to the much more manageable “Master and Slave” relationship that follows.¹⁰⁹ What is obvious here is that Hegel is making a shift from consciousness, which is concerned primarily with the *objects* of knowledge, to self-consciousness, which is concerned rather with the *subject* of knowledge. But then, the notion of “knowledge” just about drops out altogether, the essence of (self-)consciousness is now said to be “desire” (*Begierde*) (167) and the object is said to have become “Life” (168). Life in turn is claimed to have “issued from the Concept,” and is defined as “self-enclosed infinity” (168). The new criterion is said to be “independence” (169). Being is said to be “no longer abstract” but “that simple fluid substance of pure movement within itself” (*ibid.*). And then, all of a sudden, we are told that the object of desire becomes “another self-consciousness”—another person. This is obviously the most dramatic transition of the book thus far. *But what is Hegel doing here?*

The general tenor of the commentaries seems to be that here the dialectic becomes a literal process of “growth,” from desire to desire for other people and then desire for other people’s recognition. This may be both plausible as a developmental theory and as an interpre-

107. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. MacQuarrie and Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 59.

108. *Ibid.* 68–69.

109. E.g., Kaufmann, p. 152; Findlay, p. 94; Royce, *Lectures on German Idealism* (New York, 1964), p. 152ff.

tation of Hegel's sequence. But this short section is not simply a summary of a child's development from infancy to the latency period, and the obscurity of these passages should be proof enough of that.¹¹⁰ What is going on here is just as important as it is complicated, for it is in these terse and sometimes unintelligible pages that one can find or reconstruct what is probably the most important single philosophical twist in the entire *Phenomenology*. (One might call it a "Heideggerian twist" were it not for the fact that Heidegger learned it from Hegel, and, from, Fichte.)¹¹¹

Whenever Hegel gets the most opaque, it is a reasonable supposition that he may be paraphrasing some other philosopher, equally obscure. The most evasive passages in chapters 2 and 3 can sometimes be traced to more or less *verbatim* literal translations from Plato or Aristotle or Parmenides, and the vague references here in chapter 4 are distinctly identifiable as Fichte's philosophy in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which Hegel had reviewed at great length only a few years before (in his *Differenz*-essay, in the journal he edited with Schelling, in 1801.)¹¹² With this in mind, we can recall Fichte's revision of Kant, breaking down the division between knowledge and practical matters (summarized as "freedom"), and trying to "systematize" Kant's entire philosophy as essentially *practical*. But what "practical" means, in this Fichtean context, is not so much the nuts-and-bolts pragmatism of William James or John Dewey (who were, however, much influenced by Hegel), but rather the general concerns of "self"—a sense of moral integrity, a sense of freedom and autonomy. Indeed, in Fichte's uncompromising "ethical idealism," to be preoccupied with knowledge, science, and the "objectifying" attitudes of understanding was to show oneself to be a kind of inferior human being, unconcerned with *life* and oblivious to the moral struggles which define us. This is the view that Hegel is offering us here—through a glass darkly—that the proper view of consciousness is *self*-consciousness and our proper concern is

110. Cf. Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 150ff.; Findlay, p. 93f; Soll, p. 7 ff.

111. Not surprisingly, therefore, perhaps the single best exposition of this section is to be found in one of Heidegger's students: Hans Georg Gadamer, in his *Hegel's Dialectic*, pp. 54–74.

112. There is a second, cloudier set of allusions here, to the ancient philosopher Heraclitus. The view of life stated in this section so opaquely is arguably the pan-vitalism of the pre-Socratics, which Hölderlin and Goethe in particular proposed as an alternative to the "ontology of death" of modern physics (Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life* (New York: Dell, 1966)). It is Heraclitus who insists that all of life is "opposition and agreement," and Hegel suggests in his later *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that "in Heraclitus we see the perfection of knowledge so far as it has gone, a perfecting of the Idea into a totality which is the beginning of philosophy . . . the unity of opposites" (*Lectures*, vol. 1, p. 283). In the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel too defines life as "contradiction of self-recognition and self-estrangement, of inner essence and outer appearance as the immediate Idea," (87) and as "self-relating universality" (89,216).

not so much knowing as living. But, as always, this is not a view that Hegel is endorsing as such; it is one possible and appropriate response to the paradoxes of Understanding and the excessive zeal with which the physical sciences had recently declared their absolute autonomy and superiority to all other human enterprises. But Hegel had taken from Schelling the view that Fichte was simply *too* unsympathetic to science and consequently too “one-sided.”¹¹³ Hegel and Schelling, on the other hand, were by no means “anti-science” but rather just aiming at putting science—in particular the physical sciences—in their place.

Although the preliminary move in chapter 4 is to “self-consciousness,” this opening section is not yet about selfhood. It is Hegel’s view, which he states bluntly, that the self as such is not simply “given” in experience but is rather constituted in our reflection of it. This is a primary difference between self-understanding and understanding objects putatively “outside of us”; one can at least make a realist case for the fact that objects are outside of us and independent of our philosophical reflections, but there is no such clear case to be made regarding the self. “The kind of philosophy a man chooses determines the kind of man one is,” wrote Fichte; and he argued, as Hegel will argue too, that the different attitudes we take toward ourselves determine those selves. But despite the momentous differences between the topics of the earlier chapters and the chapter on self-consciousness, they are essentially related. The argument in the first three chapters has attempted to show that objects are not “given” in experience but depend upon our conceptions of them. The argument here, with “self-certainty” rather than “sense-certainty,” repeats the argument of the first chapter, that the “I” is nothing in particular; it is an “empty universal” and “everyone can equally refer to himself as ‘I’” (102). Thus Hegel’s comment on Descartes’s “*Cogito*” is that it is vacuous; and he comments that Fichte’s statement of the same principle of immediate self-recognition (“I = I”) is simply a “motionless tautology” (167). But this means that, initially, “Self-Consciousness” doesn’t have much to talk about, for the self of which we are conscious is not a thing but a process, whose development we are just beginning to investigate.¹¹⁴

In terms of the dialectic, one can recognize this section as a Fichtean

113. *Differenz*-essay, p. 126f.

114. In this context especially, it is important to remember Hegel’s praise of Kant for “emancipating mental philosophy from the ‘soul-thing’.” But Hegel criticizes Kant for not doing so for the right reasons, namely, that the self is not only “a mere simple or unchangeable sort of thing” but “active and institutes distinctions in its own nature” (*Logic*, 47).

hypothesis, namely, that knowledge must be understood only within the realm of practice, as a part of life and subservient to other concerns. Conflicting theories, views, or paradigms in science can be resolved or chosen only within the domain of this larger context. Fichte's own example was the conflict he perceived between the two "stand-points" of Kant's first two *Critiques*,—our view of ourselves as knowers and as objects in nature, on the one hand, and our view of ourselves as actors and as free agents on the other. To resolve *this* conflict by an appeal to practical considerations was to beg the question, since *of course* practical considerations would tend to favor the practical viewpoint. The general strategy of Hegel's positioning Fichte here (and also at the beginning of chapter 5) is clear enough; the quest for a theory of knowledge, once it has broken down within its own demand for absolute autonomy, is replaced by a different kind of quest. Knowledge needs further considerations to choose between conflicting views; Hegel, *via* Fichte, suggests the practical exigencies of life, in particular, *desire*.

It is important to make note of two points here—first, that this section, because it reminds us of what is most "primitive" to consciousness, might well have been given as the *beginning* of the *Phenomenology*, a starting point just as "natural" as the "natural consciousness" of simple knowing in "sense-certainty." Hegel's point, of course, is to undermine the pretensions of pure knowledge and the superiority of science, as well as to destroy the claims for autonomy that Kant gives to understanding in his first *Critique*. But this is a question of rhetorical strategy, not the "logic" of the dialectic; chapter 4 has just as much claim to be the beginning of our journey as Chapter 1. There is no unique and necessary sequence as such in the *Phenomenology*.

The second point is that it is not at all difficult to think of alternatives to "Self-Consciousness" as a follow-up to the breakdown of "Force and the Understanding"; one might insist on a return to simple religious faith and the humility of our "finite minds," as some religious leaders urge upon us whenever there is a technological disaster or scientific confusion. One might insist on an aesthetic viewpoint, which was in fact Schelling's response and the response of many contemporary scientists as well; (for instance, "elegance" and even "beauty" are not uncommon expressions among scientists and mathematicians when they are explaining their preference for one theory or theorem over another). One might simply urge that we give up knowledge (or at least, the quest for a theory of knowledge) and turn our attention

instead to strictly personal human relationships, or to political concerns, or that we reduce the whole of science, as Camus does in his *Myth of Sisyphus*, to mere metaphor:

Galileo, who held a scientific truth of great importance, abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life. In a certain sense, he did right. That truth was not worth the stake. Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference . . .

. . .

Yet all the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its mechanism and my hope increases. At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multicolored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know. Have I the time to become indignant? You have already changed theories. So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? The soft lines of these hills and the hand of evening on this troubled heart teach me much more.¹¹⁵

The simple suggestions that Hegel's dialectic has now "reached the stage of self-consciousness" and the recognition that "the object is living"¹¹⁶ are not enough; if we are to make sense of the Hegelian demonstration, we must be able to state *why* these issues have all of a sudden become of such great importance to us. True, they are part of an alternative viewpoint—namely, Fichte's—which is a "natural" successor to Kant's views in his first *Critique*, if only because of the obvious fact that Fichte did follow Kant, quite self-consciously. But what is the *criterion* which we are now trying to satisfy? Are we still after a theory of knowledge? Evidently not in the same sense as the epistemologists. But at the same time, we have not just given up on scientific knowledge. (It will return full force in the following chapter.) What we have started to suspect is that one can make sense of the cognitive enterprise only by subsuming it under a larger category—namely *life*—and by asking a very different kind of question about it—*What desire does it satisfy?* Knowledge is not autonomous; whether or not curiosity is a

115. Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. J. O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1955), pp. 3, 15.

116. Finlay, pp. 93, 94.

genuine motive, it is not all there is to knowing things. Here is where we need our Heideggerian twist, to see knowledge first of all in terms of *knowing how* (to do such and such, to satisfy desires, to live) rather than *knowing that* (two plus two equals four, *that* Paris is the capital of France, *that* there is a grand piano in front of me right now).

The new criterion, in other words, can be stated in such a way as to include the old one. The question "What is it that people want?" can be specified out of the context of our previous question, "What is it to know something?"—but it need not be (and would not be if this chapter were to have come first). The new criterion is to provide an adequate theory of human desire, and the answer Hegel intends to provide—taken again straight out of Fichte—is this: our ultimate desire is "*Freedom*." But freedom does not mean the freedom to do any particular sort of thing (free speech, freedom of worship, freedom of the press, free to hold parties until four in the morning). Freedom means independence, autonomy, a sense of one's self *as a self*. Indeed, much of the thrust of Hegel's over-all philosophy—like most of the philosophy in Germany at the time—has a touch of the stoic about it: it is only in thought that a person is wholly his own boss (Heidegger's "*Eigentlichkeit*"), free from the dictates of popes, kings and censors, free from the opinions of others, free to imagine or daydream or think whatever one wants of oneself. It is the same argument one finds in Aristotle, in praise of the contemplative life, and in Boethius, Spinoza, and Schopenhauer. In fact, it is really only Fichte, among the great philosophers of the time, who refuses utterly to accept this quietist conception of life. He was always the moral provocateur, the political firebrand, the popular spokesman; and it was this, no doubt, more than any defect in his philosophy as such, that lead Hegel (and Schelling) away from him.¹¹⁷

Freedom is self-enclosure, independence, autonomy. This is a very Kantian image, but it was also the definition that Hegel and most of his colleagues gave to the conception of life itself. In fact, Aristotle too, as well as many modern biologists, define life as a more or less autonomous system, in which the distinction between "outside" and "inside" is relatively clear and in which the functions of the whole depend on the interrelationship and proper mutual functioning of the parts. The question regarding knowledge, in other words, now becomes the question of how it functions within that more or less autonomous system. This is just the question that Descartes and the epistemologists never even asked, and the question that Kant blocked

117. "Not to know but to do is the vocation of man"—Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, trans. W. Smith (Chicago: Open Court, 1931), Book III, p. 94.

off entirely by claiming the total autonomy of knowledge. Fichte, perhaps, used overkill in asserting the thesis that knowledge and the world of nature were *nothing but* postulates of practical reason, nothing but the projection of the moral self as a stage for its moral struggles. But Hegel accepts the question, if not the solution, namely, What is the function of knowledge in life? What role does it play? Does it make us happier? More free? More aware of ourselves? And what kind of knowledge would it have to be to do all of these things?

Although Hegel tantalizes us with the concept of *desire*, he really says very little about it. There are two hints which are important but not particularly surprising; one is that it is through desire that we first get a conception of ourselves. Gadamer writes, “. . . in its immediacy it is the vital certainty of being alive; in other words, it has the confirmation of itself which it gains through the satisfaction of desire.”¹¹⁸ And so Hegel tells us—by way of one of his usual overstatements—that “self-consciousness is desire” (167, 174).¹¹⁹ The second hint is more Freudian, that desire is essentially a “negative” attitude to things, a sense of their *otherness* and the demand that they be made part of oneself. Here is where we should probably find Hegel’s comment about animals, who do not see things as objects of knowledge but rather as independent beings to be literally incorporated into oneself. The idea that desire is in one sense a desire to obliterate an object as “other” and make it instead part of oneself is familiar enough, but behind this familiar idea loom two other very large Hegelian theses which are unfortunately only alluded to and not stated and treated in full. The first is Faustian, and it is the thesis that desire by its very nature can never be satisfied, that desire produces desire and, ultimately, what we want is *everything*. (We shall see this thesis again in chapter 5.) We want to destroy all “otherness” and make it our own. We want every person and every thing to be *ours*, not just at our disposal but part of ourselves. When desire feeds on desire, the only meaningful desire is that which eludes satisfaction, an object which also stands on its own. The ideal desire is a quest which is heroic and perhaps impossible, with an object that is unattainable or a person who defeats us time after time. Thus Hegel tells us that “self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life . . . (174) and “self consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede

118. Gadamer, p. 60.

119. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure in Hegel's PG*, trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974): “The end point of desire is not the sensuous object but the unity of the I with itself. . . . What it desires, is itself” (p. 160).

it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well" (175). One might expect treatment or at least references to the *Faust* legend here, and Don Juan, King Midas, the ring of Gyges (in Plato's *Republic*), and a hundred other tales of desire, fulfilled and unfulfilled. But we do not get them. What we get is at most a promissory note, that consciousness through desire is not primarily curious but *voracious*. It wants to devour everything (as an infant tries literally to do, by sticking everything in its mouth. It wants to make the whole world its own, not so much to please as to *prove* itself). The self, according to Hegel, is nothing less than this identification with the whole, which is so far cast only in the extremely crude form of desire. ("*Begierde*" might just as well be translated as "lust" or "appetite" as simple "desire.")

The other suggestion in this section that deserves special comment, is this: Hegel claims not once but several times that the object of desire is itself another living thing. It is easy to dismiss this as a bit of sophistry, an anticipation of his next move, in which Hegel raises questions about our primordial attitudes toward other people.¹²⁰ Taken literally, what Hegel says is false, of course. Much of what we want are mere things—dead, inorganic, inanimate, lifeless—diamonds, sports cars, salt, pepper, and a glass of water. If Hegel were trying to sneak in a transition from the claim that consciousness must be understood not as knowledge but as self-consciousness, desire, and as a living thing, to the very different claims he is about to put forward in the following "Master and Slave" section about interpersonal relationships, then it would be easy to understand the purpose behind this sleight of hand. But if that interpretation were true, one would have to conclude that *here* (not, as many readers have often felt, in the transition to chapter 4 as such) the dialectic breaks down, that Hegel has failed, for the first time, to give us even a bad reason for making the transition from this, the most terse section of the book, to "Master and Slave," which is, perhaps the clearest.

The alternative, and a way to make sense of this transition (as well as the transition into chapter 5, which we are about to discuss), is to take seriously Hegel's claim that the objects of desire are living beings, even where, to our way of thinking, such a claim is patently false.¹²¹ First of all, it should be pointed out that the phrase translated here as "living being" is "*ein Lebendiges*" rather than "*ein Lebewesen*," which

120. Cf. Findlay: "Hegel devotes some space at this point to a somewhat exuberant characterization of life" (p. 94).

121. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Eric Santner, who raised and developed the following points in a seminar at the University of Texas in 1979.

suggests that it is not full-blown animism that Hegel has in mind here, but rather the thing we desire as itself a “dynamic entity,” a “vital being.” Hegel’s own thesis here seems to be that we come to appreciate the independence of things not when we come to *know* them but rather when we come to recognize our own dependence upon them;

In this satisfaction, however, experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence. Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object. . . . On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself; and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be *for* the other what it is. (175)

Ultimately, Hegel concludes, “*self-consciousness can find its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness,*” that is, in other people. But before we reach that conclusion, the argument is that even in our dealings with things, they are seen by us not primarily as mechanisms nor as objects of knowledge, but rather as independent beings with a will of their own.

Let’s take a homely example; I jump in my car, late to class as usual, turn the ignition key but, not (entirely) as usual, the motor will not start. The starter is doing its job, but slowing down by the second. The battery is getting low and it is getting obvious that the car needs a tune up, badly. Normally, when my car is working well, I don’t think of it as such at all; I *use* it. I get in, drive to class, thinking all the time about the lecture to come, paying attention to pedestrians and stop signals, but not the car, not even for a moment. But today, the damned thing won’t start. I plead with it. I apologize for not taking better care of it. I promise it a new set of spark plugs. I curse at it and, just as the taxi comes, I give it a punitive kick. Is this *irrational*? If I come to think of the car *as an object of scientific knowledge* as a living being, something is indeed very wrong. But as an object of my desires, it is not irrational to treat it so. Indeed, we tend to treat most objects, not only trees and flowers and cockroaches, but volcanoes, the weather, and most “mechanisms” with this sense of liveliness. This is not yet pan-vitalism—the view that these things are actually alive. But it is, phenomenologically, a more accurate description of how we relate to the things in our daily world than the overly cognitive and mechanical account of the same things as objects of scientific knowledge. Thus in desire, one does indeed view objects as “living beings,” in the sense just described.

My homely description of my car, of course, is a more American version of Heidegger’s even more homely peasant example about the

hammer. We do not notice a hammer when we are using it, he writes in *Being and Time*, but rather we first come to notice it as a "Thing" when it somehow goes wrong, when it gets in the way or doesn't work; then it becomes "obstinate" and "obtrusive."¹²² It is Heidegger, too, who insists that we cannot appreciate the nature of things when we consider them just "for us"; we have to appreciate them "for themselves", as things not known, even as having a "mysterious inner life of their own." (Thus there has been a whole tradition, including Hölderlin and Rilke, of German "*Ding-Gedichte*" or "thing-poems," for example, Rilke's intimate address to a hand-ball.¹²³) Hegel is not an animist, who literally believes that all things are alive, but he nevertheless has a view of reality which is far more filled by activity and liveliness than the "dead" ontology of Newtonian physics. Indeed, the transition from "force" in "Force and the Understanding" to "life" in this section can be viewed not so much as an attack on the scientific world-view as an attack on a particularly morbid world-view, in which the dynamism and vitality are drained from things and in which what passes for scientific explanation are vacuous laws and *ad hoc* dispositions. But if Hegel criticized Aristotle in chapter 3 for his tautological explanations in terms of "potentiality" (Molière's crack about "soporific powers" etc.), he gives Aristotle his proper due in what follows. The vision of the world that emerges from Hegel's *Phenomenology* is extremely Aristotelean, and what makes it so, more than anything else, is the continuous emphasis on "inner principles," not as dubious dispositional explanations, but as vital, living forces. Indeed, Hegel is not even suggesting that we adopt such a vision so much as he is claiming that we already *do* see the world this way, and it is only the domineering mechanical metaphors of the Newtonian world-view that make us think that our experience is otherwise.

With this bit of phenomenology, I think we can make good sense out of the opening pages of chapter 4, on "The Truth of Self-Certainty." The dialectical play of the first three chapters were mainly concerned with the nature of what we know—whether we primarily know particulars or sets of properties or objects constituted by our concepts or events explained by unseen forces or laws. The "I" that did the knowing was left mostly implicit, taken for granted, presumably (uncritically) an individual consciousness whose role in life (as "*cogito*" or "transcendental ego") was primarily to know things—to observe and to formulate theories. But none of these views about knowledge worked out as planned, and so an alternative view of consciousness, an alter-

122. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 74.

123. Eric Santner, "Saving the Things," unpublished ms., 1979, p. 14.

native view of "Things," and an alternative view of self were proposed. Consciousness is now proposed to be primarily a practical consciousness, concerned with the exigencies of life and the satisfaction of desire. Things, on the new account, are not primarily objects of knowledge but instruments, "equipment," objects of desire and, as such, to be viewed very differently from the way we view them in knowing them.¹²⁴ The self, finally, is no longer taken for granted as mere cognitive "I" but now becomes a living flesh and blood creature whose life consists of much more than knowing. Taking these three new views together, we can see that Hegel can be taken to be suggesting something like the following (again Heideggerian) thesis: the distinction between consciousness and its objects is primarily a product of an overly cognitive and observational view of consciousness, as primarily *knowing* rather than *living*. But when we think of life in general, this distinction doesn't make much sense. It is the very nature of desire to see objects either as indifferent (i.e. of no interest whatsoever) or as independent beings which we want to identify with, to take into ourselves. An object too easily obtained is not an object we tend to identify with, whereas an object that is "obstinate" or threatening tends to be a powerful source of identity. The view that is being proposed here is essentially the Fichtean view—which Hegel will soon enough reject—that the only real existence of things is as objects of desire, instruments of a thoroughly *practical* consciousness whose interest in life is life itself, in proving itself and its independence, in testing its mettle against forces and obstacles which it "posits" in its own path. It is, and was in the eyes of many of Fichte's followers, a *romantic* alternative to the mechanistic and conscientiously detached scientific views of the Enlightenment, with its promises of eternal peace and happiness through knowledge. Fichte brought back the struggle and the uncertainty to life; indeed he brought back *life* to a view of human existence that was beginning to find itself more at home in the laboratory and the university seminar room than in the moral struggles of a difficult world.

Hegel rejected Fichte's view. He rejected the still tacit assumption (which was not actually Fichte's) that the self is an individual self. He rejected the idea of a self that, as in the Cartesian *Cogito*, was still without any content. He consequently rejected the concept of desire

124. The most captivating modern account of this difference is the extended sermon on motorcycle fetishism in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York: Bantam, 1974), in which he distinguishes at great length the "classical" (analytic) perspective in which a motorcycle is a mechanism made of parts and the "romantic" (synthetic, "instrumental" in Heidegger's sense) view that one has of a motorcycle when riding it, when self and cycle become essentially one.

presumed here, as a Faustian longing after things and satisfaction, and he rejected the idea of self as merely a function of desire. What is wrong with this whole enterprise—though it must be said that Hegel does not even make the attempt to provide us with a satisfactory argument to this effect—is that no account of self-consciousness, self, or desire can possibly be adequate without a simultaneous account of our relations with and desires concerning *other people*. This is where Hegel states, with only a hint of argument, that “*self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*” (175). The hint of argument seems to be that we define ourselves in terms of our desires, but since desires too easily satisfied are too transitory to allow for much satisfaction, we most desire objects that stand their own ground and are self-contained (i.e. “infinite”). Other people, presumably, present the most difficulties and are most obstinate regarding our desires concerning them. From here, the transition to “Master and Slave” is at least intelligible, but it cannot be said that Hegel has really established the inadequacy of the Faustian-Fichtean form of self-consciousness as *desire*. Indeed, since half of that form comes to us later (in chapter 5) it should be seriously questioned whether these first few pages are really a distinct form of consciousness at all.¹²⁵

If we are to make maximum sense of what goes on in these pages, I suggest that we not make the customary move, with the customary sigh of relief, into the clear-cut situation of the “Master and Slave” parable (178–96). The path we have been following instead leads another way, around the whole chapter on “self-consciousness” and directly on to chapter 5, where Fichte is picked up once again, this time in a somewhat more favorable and less “romantic” light.

g. Hegel's Philosophy of Nature (“Reason” in chapter 5A)

Productive Force [*Kraft*] is mind striving to organize itself; so too in the outer world, a universal tendency to organize must reveal itself. —F.W.J. von Schelling, *Ideas towards a Philosophy of Nature*

The most foreign section of the *Phenomenology*, for us, is that first part of chapter 5, “Observing Reason,” in which Hegel presents us with

125. It should be noted that virtually the whole of the *PG*, from here on, displays a Fichtean influence. The “Master and Slave” parable to follow, for example, is a Fichtean illustration, as well as the rather clear statement of Fichte’s “ethical idealism” that opens chapter 5. The long discussions of ethics in chapters 5 and 6 also owe a heavy debt to Fichte, even if Hegel emerges as more of a critic than a follower.

his philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*), or what we would call his “philosophy of science.” It seems foreign to us because, whereas the problems of epistemology, the nature of human relationships, and questions about the good life have a certain endurance through history, scientific styles and theories do not. The ethical theories of the early 19th century are still a matter of vigorous debate; the scientific views of the period are, at most, merely quaint. And yet, it would be a mistake to simply dismiss the entire section, as some commentators are happy to do.¹²⁶ The scientific details are odd, or worse, and Hegel’s analogies are sometimes absurd (he himself later chastised them as “superficial” and “crude” in *The Philosophy of Nature*).¹²⁷ But the section is nevertheless revealing and, in its over-all viewpoint, extremely important to an understanding of the *Phenomenology* in general and Hegel’s objections to “understanding” in chapter 3 in particular.

Kant had distinguished between “understanding” and “reason” as the two “faculties” of the human mind which deal with concepts: the first is concerned wholly with the application of concepts to experience, the second is involved in an odd collection of tasks, including reflection on the use of concepts by the understanding, doing logic, the formulation of “practical” principles, and the more suspicious tasks of traditional metaphysics and theology. What reason can *not* do is provide us with knowledge about the phenomenal world, according to Kant, because it has no experiential basis. The distinction soon becomes the key to German Idealism, and Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all come to champion reason and disparage understanding, since reason, *contra* Kant, is supposed to be the faculty which gives us knowledge of the world “in-itself,” as understanding does not. In his earlier *Differenz*-essay of 1801, and later in the *Science of Logic* in 1812, Hegel talks about the Kantian contrast between the two faculties at some length, but in the *Phenomenology* the distinction is not so much talked about as simply introduced as a primary organizing principle. The key *theoretical* contrast in the book is between “understanding” and “reason.” (Hegel does not use the word “theoretical” very much in the *Phenomenology*, but he has no qualms about it in his other works,

126. Findlay called the section “confused and uncomfortable” and summarizes it in a page (p. 103), but his attitude turned to enthusiasm when he wrote the foreword to *The Philosophy of Nature* in 1968. Charles Taylor gives us only “the briefest indication” of the section as an apology for contingency and finishes it off in two paragraphs. But if this section is to make any sense at all, it is not an “apology for contingency” and—as the cornerstone of Schelling’s philosophy—it is absolutely essential to the *PG*. For a good appreciation of Schelling’s importance here (but misplaced as an analysis of chapter 4), see Henry B. Smith, “The Transition from Bewusstsein to Selbstbewusstsein” (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1947).

127. *The Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Miller, p. 1.

including his own Lectures on the Philosophy of Nature at Jena.¹²⁸ This is why the whole of chapter 4, "Self-Consciousness," can be viewed from this perspective as a distraction, making less than obvious one of the most basic arguments in the whole of post-Kantian philosophy—that *knowledge of nature is not limited to the understanding*.

Historically, of course, Fichte fits into "Self-Consciousness," preceding Schelling, who is the key figure of "Observing Reason," this first section of chapter 5. In fact, anyone who has looked at any of the versions of Schelling's own "philosophy of nature," which he published between 1797 and the time Hegel also started teaching the subject at Jena, will instantly recognize not only the tone but even the organization of this section, for it is all Schelling. But again, it is essential that we not reduce the point of the piece to an unspoken allusion, and again too it is essential to remember that there need not be a single linear progression from "Force and the Understanding" (and the first few pages of "Self-Consciousness") to "Reason" and another form of consciousness. In fact, Hegel is offering us two related alternatives to "understanding," though there is no question which he thinks to be superior; the first is Fichte's, and it consists of a rejection of not only understanding but knowledge too, in favor of a heightened sense of reason in its purely *practical* applications. The second is Schelling's, which was in part a reaction against Fichte's purely "ethical" idealism and the reassertion of the importance of nature and knowledge of nature—but through reason, not through the categories of the understanding.

This distinction seems relatively unimportant to us, perhaps, but it was all-important to them. The "faculty" view of the mind is not essential to it (in fact, Hegel didn't accept this either) nor is the terminology as such—except for the fact that Kant had used the two terms this way. But the battle is not about terms; in fact, it is a battle over the very meaning of the ideal "knowledge" (as in the earlier chapters) and, vis-à-vis chapter 3, a battle over the meaning of the scientific enterprise, the nature of scientific explanation and the character of the scientific viewpoint. What "understanding" really amounted to was not just a "fixed" set of categories, but a very specific conception of the world, a Newtonian, "mechanical," *causal* view of the world. And since, according to Kant, the categories of the understanding were the only source of *knowledge*, what followed was the view—wholly unacceptable to Fichte, Schelling, Goethe, Hegel, and a whole generation of German intellectuals—that the world is a mechanism, at

128. See, e.g., Harris on the *Differenz*-essay, p. 59.

least as far as science is concerned, and causal explanations—accounts of an event in terms of its causes and effects—are the only fully legitimate form of explanation.

It is important to say, straight off, that not even Newton and Kant were satisfied with this account. Newton supplemented his laws of force with the hypothesis that God gave purpose to the whole business, and he spent the rest of his life trying to work this out. Kant insisted that *knowledge* consisted of causal relationships but, nevertheless, another form of explanation was not only possible but heuristically necessary, even “intrinsic to the human mind.” This second form of explanation was *teleology*, accounts in terms of *purposes*. In biology and psychology, for example, causal explanations are rarely available, often trivial, and virtually always less informative than an explanation in terms of the purpose of a certain organ, or the purpose of a certain bit of behavior. To know the chemical causes of an insect’s foul smell or protective coloring, or to know the evolutionary sequence that favored its survival rather than others, is not yet to satisfy that primitive teleological demand, to know *why*, for what purpose, that bug smells so bad. Thus Kant tells us that this importance of function, or what he calls “the physical ends” or “intrinsic finality” of organisms, “leads reason into an order of things entirely different from that of a mere mechanism of nature, which *mere mechanism* no longer provides adequate.”¹²⁹ And it is not just individual living things that require such accounts; the whole of the universe, according to Kant just as much as Goethe or Hegel, is not just a dead batch of matter but a living organism, which exists for a purpose. Thus, Kant tells us, “nature does nothing in vain,”¹³⁰ a slogan which might well be taken as the watchword of their view of science. This may not be so obvious to us but (as, “the principle of sufficient reason”) it was considered an utter necessity to almost every German philosopher, from Leibniz to Schopenhauer.

The problem with this in Kant’s philosophy was that, even though he too insisted that this teleological principle was of the utmost necessity for any rational view of the world, his own theory of knowledge made it impossible for him to say that he *knew* this to be the case. That is, in his terminology, it was not “constitutive” and therefore part of nature as we know it at all, but at best a “regulative principle,” a “subjective necessity” which happened to be universal. This is what Hegel and his colleagues object to, the relegation of what they see as the

129. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Meredith (Oxford, 1952), ¶ 66.

130. *Ibid.*

most important single principle of the scientific enterprise to secondary, non-cognitive status. Hegel summarizes the objection in 1801:

Kant acknowledges nature; he posits the object to be something undetermined (by understanding) and he views nature as Subject-Object in that he treats the product of nature as an end of nature, as purposeful without a concept of purpose, as necessary without being mechanistic, as identity of concept and being. But at the same time this view of nature is supposed to be merely teleological, that is to say, it only serves validly as a maxim for our limited human understanding whose thinking is discursive and whose universal concepts do not contain the particular phenomenon of nature."¹³¹

What we see here is a classic confrontation between two paradigms of science, two opposed ways of looking at nature, one mechanical and "dead," one purposeful and as a "living thing." We can see now the importance of Hegel's obscure ruminations about the object of consciousness as *ein Lebendige* in the first pages of chapter 4, for this is no simple quirk of lascivious desire but the desideratum of the scientific viewpoint as well. The whole world is to be considered as a living being and insofar as causal-mechanical accounts have their role in science, they—not teleological accounts—are to be considered secondary. Biology, not physics, should be considered the paradigm science according to Hegel and his colleagues. (Goethe, remember, was a botanist, and the scientific imagery here is very much in tune with Aristotle, who was also primarily a biologist.) It is the *life sciences* that are central to knowledge, not the physical sciences; the problem is not that biology cannot come up with causal explanations but rather that physics refuses to consider teleological accounts. (Thus Hölderlin, who became fascinated with astronomy as a student, developed an animistic view of the solar system, which his friends Schelling and Hegel continued to argue in a more prosaic form in their respective philosophies of nature.¹³²)

The confrontation of "reason" and "understanding," therefore, is not just a battle of words; it is a basic battle of viewpoints about the nature of reality. Reason is the faculty of *synthesis*; it sees interconnections, comprehends the place of a thing or an event in the larger picture, understands purposes; understanding is rather the faculty of

131. *Differenz*-essay, p. 163.

132. This is the place to point out once again, with some amusement, the fact that the central concepts of post-Einsteinian physics are becoming increasingly teleological, just as psychology and the life sciences are trying so desperately to reduce their vocabulary to purely causal terminology. See, for a comment, Harold J. Morowitz, "Rediscovering the Mind," *Psychology Today* (August 1980), p. 12 f.

analysis, breaking things down to discover the interrelations of the parts. Reason is championed by those thinkers who insist on seeing the world as *activity*; in fact, Hegel has defined “reason” itself as “purposive activity” (in the Preface, 22). The underlying premise of the “philosophy of nature,” for both Schelling and Hegel, is *teleology*, nature itself as activity, or what Schelling calls (following Aristotle) “self-activity.” Thus Hegel’s rejection of “understanding” in chapter 3 was not just a rejection of the idea of “pure knowledge” but the rejection of a too-restricted notion of knowledge, Kant’s causal conception of understanding. What we now find in the *Phenomenology*, therefore, is a very different conception of consciousness as knowledge, as “reason,” which knows the universe as a living thing, akin to itself.¹³³

The chapter “Reason” and the section “Observing Reason” begin with a discussion of *idealism*; “Reason, assured of itself . . . is at peace with [both the world and itself] . . . its thinking is itself directly actuality” (232). Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel—as well as virtually all of the Romantics—were idealists—they saw the world as inseparable from, if not actually created by, our consciousness of it. Kant had short-changed nature, according to Schelling and Hegel, by relegating to it the limited concepts of the understanding; Fichte had done nature an even greater disservice by reducing it to a mere projection (“posit”) of practical reason. The Romantics, of course, were not to be taken all that seriously, for they had eliminated reason from the picture and were not concerned with *knowledge* at all. But Kant and Fichte, who were not to be ignored, both turned out to be “*subjective* idealists,” by which Hegel (and Schelling) meant that they ignored the objective, independent reality of nature.¹³⁴

We have by now been through Hegel’s main objections to Kant—his limiting of knowledge to understanding, his unnecessary and ultimately disastrous postulation of a world “in-itself” beyond experience, and his relegation of teleology and the life sciences to a secondary place in science—secondary to, and problematic because of, Newton’s physics and the primacy of mechanical explanatory accounts. The objection to Fichte is in a way much simpler—he ignored nature entirely, did not consider the possibility that nature might have its own purposes in addition to its usefulness *for us*. Fichte’s “Reason,”

133. Thus we can understand one of Hegel’s favorite metaphors—the anatomical dissection metaphor we meet in the first paragraph of the Preface. Dissection allows us to *understand* how something works, but it presupposes some *comprehension* of what it is, what it does, and why it does it.

134. Harris wisely comments that “Kant would have been surprised to hear that he had left the reality of nature in doubt” (*Differenz*-essay, p. 47).

according to Hegel, was “concerned only with independence and freedom, concerned to save and maintain itself for itself at the expense of the *world*, or of its own actuality . . . ”(232). It is Fichte’s voracious idealism that sees all reality as “mine” (238) but, nevertheless, fails to yield “true knowing,” precisely because it ignores the independent activities of nature. This is the transition from chapter 4 to 5, for if the problem with “Consciousness” was that it had no conception of itself as practical activity, the problem with Fichte and “Self-Consciousness” is that it pays too little attention to its theoretical role as *observer*. Thus “Observing Reason” is consciousness once again in its scientific role, but now purged of its overly restrictive causal limitations as “understanding” and the Newtonian obsession with mechanism. It is the aim (and criterion) of reason to see the universe as a purposive whole, as an activity parallel to, and ultimately identical to, its own conceptual activities.

The view presented here is Schelling’s; in fact, much of the section is a transcription of Hegel’s own lectures in the philosophy of nature (1803/04 and 1804/05) which are in turn virtual transcriptions of Schelling’s *Ideas Towards a Philosophy of Nature* (1797) and *System of Philosophy of Nature* (1799). In 1798 Schelling had published his *World-Soul as a Hypothesis for Physics*, and just before Hegel started writing and lecturing on the subject himself, Schelling had published three new versions of his system, including an “identity” theory in which consciousness and nature were to be seen as two aspects of a single reality. The basis of this dual-aspect theory was a single concept of “force,” but not the Newtonian force of “understanding”—rather the Leibnizian “force” of reason, an inner animating activity whose purpose is self-realization, an increasingly clear consciousness of what one is, namely, rational activity. Nature too, as our unconscious aspect, is rational activity (“purposiveness without a conscious purpose,” Kant had called it). Hegel’s premise, borrowed directly from Schelling, is that we know ourselves only as well as we know nature. It is a matter of personal and practical importance too that “Nature does nothing in vain.”

Idealism, as Hegel presents it here, is not the thesis that “all objects are in the mind,” or anything of the sort. Indeed, he begins by attacking all such views, first of all, because they do not give proper credit to objective nature and, second of all, because “abstract empty phrases” (238) don’t really claim anything at all. Idealism, in Hegel’s view, is the inseparability of nature and consciousness, the fact that both are to be understood as rational (that is, as integrative) activities and, ul-

timately, as one and the same activity, viewed from two different aspects.¹³⁵

Before we go on to explore the outline of Hegel's philosophy of nature and the sometimes extravagant teleological view he borrows from Schelling, I want to draw back for a moment and reconsider what Hegel and Schelling simply took for granted, but to us seems outrageous. For example, in 1796, in Berne, Hegel drew up a proposal for a "system" he would construct, and he begins;

The first idea is, of course, the presentation of *my* self as an absolutely free entity (*Wesen*). Along with the free, self-conscious essence there stands forth—out of nothing—an entire *world*—the one true and thinkable creation out of nothing.—Here I shall descend into the realms of physics; the question is this: how must a world be constituted for a moral entity? I would like to give wings once more to our backward physics, that advances laboriously by experiments.¹³⁶

The first thing to notice is that what seems extremely dubious to us is simply "of course" to him, namely, the proposal that one starts a discussion of the nature of the world with the presentation of self. But this was, we know, the first premise of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (published two years before) and the first premise of Schelling's "*The I as the Principle of Philosophy*" (published just the year before). One generation's cipher may be another's tautology.

The second thing to notice, again, is Hegel's evident disdain for physics, even though he is educated enough, and interested enough, to write and lecture about it and "speculate" about its significance. (A few sentences later, he writes, "it does not appear that our present-day physics can satisfy a creative spirit such as ours . . .")¹³⁷ Idealism, for Hegel, may not be so much an ontological claim about the status of objects *vis-à-vis* the human mind as it is a hermeneutical view about nature as constituted by the same activity as the mind and therefore necessarily comprehensible to us, not as a series of scientific laws but as a being in which we share our existence. "It," in fact, is *us*, not only "for us" and not just "in itself." It is reason "actualizing itself" in the material world, just as it is also doing in us, as Spirit.

Idealism seems to us an incomprehensible view of the world, and it is not enough, in a present-day presentation of Hegel, simply so to

135. Russell's view of Hegel as an idealist who thought that everything "is in the mind" becomes wrong again, with an ironic twist, when we consider that Hegel's actual view (borrowed here from Schelling) is a "dual-aspect" theory of consciousness, which Russell himself once defended. So did Spinoza, who certainly is not, by any measure, an idealist.

136. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, p. 510.

137. *Ibid.*

classify him, with the appropriate qualifications, and leave it go at that. How could an entire generation of intellectuals believe such a view? With Aristotle, we can shrug our shoulders and say that he was a part of a very different culture, in which such speculative teleological accounts were accepted by everyone and the apparatus of modern science was not even imagined by anyone. But one cannot say that of Goethe, or Schelling, or Hegel, and certainly one cannot say that of Kant, who was as well versed in his contemporary science as any philosopher ever has been, before or since. (Except Aristotle.) What did they believe, which we evidently do not, that made idealism not only an attractive theory but a view that seemed to be absolutely necessary?

From one point of view, what we might call the “naturalistic” point of view, idealism is absurd. If one accepts the idea that the world is just “there,” a physical universe in space and time, and we are born into it (or “thrown,” in the more dramatic Heideggerian phrase), then the idea that the world is consciousness-dependent is a bit of nonsense which only a philosopher, or a paranoid schizophrenic, could believe. From this viewpoint (which Hegel would call, “from the point of view of the object”), consciousness is a contingency; one can ask, as Carl Sagan asks in *The Dragons of Eden*, “How did it come about?” or, “What are the properties of the world, apart from our experience of them?” or “What would the world seem like if sensed only through smell, or hearing?”¹³⁸ The world is simply there, no matter what kinds of qualifications an epistemologist might make about how we come to know it or what we have to contribute to perception to get knowledge. The world is there “in itself” and not, except as a matter of felicitous circumstance, “for us.” Idealism—the view that the world is essentially “for us”—is not only false; it is egomaniacal nonsense.

But there is another point of view, one which most philosophers from Descartes to Husserl, including Hegel, take virtually for granted. (Why this is so may be an interesting bit of psychology, but not for here.) This is the first-person standpoint, the view of the world *from consciousness*, a view of the world as it is “for us.” From this point of view, consciousness is just “there”—or rather, “here” (“*dasein*”); the world is the contingency. Thus the philosopher can ask, “Why is it there?” (“Why is there something rather than nothing?” was Schelling’s question, picked up famously by Heidegger.) The philosopher can wonder whether the world is *really* there, or if we can know for certain that it is. From this point of view (as the Cartesian *Cogito* and

138. See, for a good example, P.F. Strawson, *Individuals*, ch. 2.

the “intellectual intuitions” of Fichte and Schelling make so clear) the brute existence of consciousness (however conceived) is the given, the world “the problem.” From this viewpoint, the world too easily tends to drift into unreality, as a mere “phenomenon,” as “Idea,” “as “appearance,” or else, in a confused mixture of the two standpoints, it is supposed that the world is, on the one hand, out there, “in itself,” and at the same time, “for us.” But then these two worlds tend to float apart, the one unknowable, the other, consequently, something of a lie.

It is from the first person standpoint, in which consciousness is taken for granted but the world is not, that idealism not only makes sense but becomes the *inescapable* position. To deny idealism is to deny, either that there is a world at all, or that the world is real, or that we can know it—all of which are absurd. To adopt a half-hearted idealism, insisting, for example, that the world is, on the one hand, necessarily “for us”, but, on the other, unknowable and “in itself,” is equally absurd. A thorough-going idealism, that is, an “absolute” idealism, will say quite simply—Here is consciousness and here is the world and the world is necessarily “for us,” but also “in itself,” for us. The two in fact are one, or what Hegel and Schelling call “Subject-Object.” One can focus on one aspect or the other, the first as “Ego” the second as “Nature,” but to deny their unity is to lapse into nonsense. Or to emphasize one side more than the other, to reduce one to the other, is also nonsense. Thus Hegel (and Schelling) do *not* say (as Bertrand Russell assumed that they did) that all objects are *in* the mind, but from the first person standpoint it becomes the only intelligible thesis that objects *for* consciousness and objects “in themselves” can be distinguished only at the cost of extreme absurdity.

From this first-person standpoint, the world, which seems “given” to us in experience, takes on an odd character. On the one hand, we know it as an object for consciousness, but then, we are incapable of voluntarily “turning it off.” Thus the objection raised against idealism in general and against Fichte’s idealism in particular has always been—“if consciousness creates the world, then why can’t it create it any way that it likes?” To answer this challenge, the British idealist Bishop Berkeley suggested that the “givenness” of sensations was due to God’s causing them in us, and Leibniz too insisted that perception had to be as it was because God had pre-programmed us for these and no other experiences. Kant answered the query by attributing the involuntariness to the “given” manifold of intuition and the transcendental necessity of the concepts of the understanding. But these answers are closed off to the more thorough-going idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, who reject the idea of any “given” in experience

(including sensations) because that would suggest something *outside* of all experience (either God or objects “in-themselves”) as the cause. To explain the nature of the objective world and why it *must* have the forms it does requires an internal “deduction,” a demonstration why we see the world this way rather than that way, why we *cannot* just decide to see the world that way instead of this way.

The section on “Observing Reason” is Hegel’s equivalent of Kant’s “transcendental deduction of the categories,” but where Kant sees his deduction as an analysis of the understanding, Hegel sees the function of reason’s examination of its own observational categories in terms of an underlying identity between the activities of nature and our own activities of knowing. He does not provide us with a “deduction” in Kant’s sense, but he is not trying to. The thesis of the entire *Phenomenology*, which has now come to the fore with the “Inverted World,” the pragmatic shift of chapter 4 and the shift to “Reason” and teleology, is that there is no way the world *must* be, that “we have to think pure change” (160). The world is as it is for us, and as we change the world changes too. Differences in nature, accordingly, are ultimately differences in thought.

The section itself is divided into three parts, following the introductory remarks which we have just been reconstructing in their historical context. The first and by far the longest part concerns “the observation of nature” and it is, in extremely condensed form, the “philosophy of nature” that Hegel and Schelling had taught in their classes at Jena. In those courses, however, and in Schelling’s various publications on the subject, proportionally much more material was concerned with inorganic nature, and particularly the newest theories of light, magnetism, electricity, and chemistry.¹³⁹ The discussion of organic nature, then, was considered as a “higher level” (*Potenz*) of inorganic nature, and Hegel particularly delighted in forging analogies between the two—for example, between the “positive and negative” poles and “attraction and repulsion” of electricity and the sexual attraction and repulsion of animals. (It was this kind of analogy he later called “superficial and crude.”) They were also concerned with geology and the structure of the world, which is left out of the *Phenomenology* but plays a prominent place in their lectures, in Schelling’s system (as the lowest *Potenz*) and in Hegel’s later *Philosophy of Nature*. (For those who cling to the old idea of idealism, that the world exists wholly in the mind, it may be worthwhile pointing out that Hegel there does assert, without a hint of contradiction or hesitation, that

139. See Harris’s valuable outlines of their courses in the *Differenz*-essay, pp. 52, 59.

the world did indeed exist before there were minds on earth to be conscious of it.¹⁴⁰)

In the *Phenomenology*, the concern with inorganic matter is minimal, limited to a few comments about gravitation and chemistry. Hegel's main concern is to subsume the physical sciences under the life sciences, to elevate teleology to the central principle of science, and to emphasize what he has already suggested in chapter 4, that life, unlike mechanical processes, is to be understood only as a self-sustaining, indivisible teleological system, as an "infinity," as Kant and Goethe had argued, with Aristotle before them. The main point here is that we don't simply *observe* the "inner movement of the organism" but rather "grasp it through the Concept" (261). This is Hegel's over-all point to make about science in general—that it is not merely "observational" but rather a matter of *self-awareness*. Science, as the domain of reason rather than understanding, is the recognition of the same concepts (and ultimately, the Concept) in both thought and the world. Today, we consider "empathy" a most unscientific procedure, but for Hegel and Schelling it is an essential tool for comprehending nature, especially in the understanding of other creatures. We too know what it is to act for a purpose and what it is to be a self-contained organism. But this need for empathy means that "Observing Reason" isn't enough for understanding nature either, for what we know is not so much observable as *conceivable* through thinking. So we move, very quickly, to the observation of our own self-consciousness and the psychological laws of thought (298–308), about which Hegel concludes precociously but too quickly that one cannot separate behavior from the context in which it is behavior and that so-called psychological laws (for example, stimulus-response laws) are not laws at all. Finally, in what is universally recognized to be the oddest single section of the entire book, Hegel considers the relationship between mind and body, "inner activity" and "outer expression," a perennial philosophical question which Hegel hides quaintly and misleadingly behind the two notable pseudo-sciences of his day, *physiognomy* (the theory that one can tell a person's character from his facial features and body shape) and *phrenology* (Franz Joseph Gall's theory that character is reflected by the various bumps and shapes of the skull). But each of these pseudo-sciences has its serious and still defended counterparts—for example, the still popular "mind-body identity theory,"¹⁴¹ which Hegel effectively challenges in the course of this section.

140. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Miller, ¶ 338 ff.

141. I have tried to express my own "Doubts about the Correlation Thesis: The New Phrenology," in *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 26, (March 1975).

The three parts of the section roughly parallel the three parts of Schelling's system of nature, which is divided into a science of nature, a science of intelligence, and an "indifference point" in which the two are seen as one and the same. (In Schelling's philosophy, this "point" is a matter of art and religion, "indifferent" to reason, which became a prime source of disagreement with Hegel.) The general strategy, familiar to us already in the triadic structure of the *Phenomenology*, is to begin considering the object (in this case, nature), only to find that one cannot explain our observation of nature except by way of explaining the laws which we ourselves use to understand its activity, only to find that we cannot understand ourselves and our psychology except in the context of what we are trying to comprehend. The problem in the *Phenomenology* is that the discussion stops rather abruptly at this point, and the problem of knowledge (what is it to know something? what is it that we know?) just evaporates, replaced wholesale by the various practical concerns of ethics and history, and then religion. Schelling's "indifference point," as "absolute knowing," does not come up until 270 pages later, and then with a mere passing reference to "Nature" (807). Within the context of the *Phenomenology* alone, therefore, one is tempted to conclude that science of any sort, and nature too, is not of primary importance in Hegel's over-all view of human experience. It fascinates him, we know from other sources (including, especially, his later *Philosophy of Nature*), but, in the vast panorama of the *Phenomenology*, knowledge is essentially ethical, life is predominantly ethical life, and insofar as nature enters into it, it is mainly a matter of curiosity, or utility, or, in religion, a source of objects of primitive worship. Hegel's "philosophy of nature," so far as the *Phenomenology* is concerned, would seem to be that it is our own activities that are of genuine importance. Polemics aside, he is not so far from Fichte after all. Or from most of us, for that matter.

THE DIALECTIC OF NATURE: FROM THINGS TO BRAINS AND BEYOND

The over-all strategy of "Observing Reason," clumsily executed, is this: having argued (with Schelling and against Fichte) that we know ourselves only insofar as we know nature too, and having already shown in general that knowledge requires conceptualization, Hegel now argues that knowledge, as well as desire (in chapter 4) takes as its primary objects *living things*. What this means is that, although he is presumably talking about nature in general—corn plants, beetles, mosses,

mushrooms, bees, banana trees, squids, and pond scum—Hegel restricts his discussion almost entirely to the higher animals; indeed, he even casts doubt on the identity of plants as fully living things. (“As a matter of fact, the vegetable organism expresses only the simple notion of the organism, which does not develop its moments” (265).¹⁴² Hegel’s strategy, in other words, is to shift our attention from knowledge of things and their forces (in chapter 3) to knowledge about living creatures and their activities. What defines a living creature is just the fact that it is a teleological system which cannot be understood except as a whole, which cannot exist in the sum of its parts alone. (Thus plants, which can grow from clippings and reproduce asexually, and minerals, which can be broken into fine grains with their properties still intact, are less living and more difficult to emphathize with, to put it mildly.) With this as our criterion, it is easy to understand why most of the section consists of arguments against analysis and the understanding of living things through their parts: “there are no laws,” Hegel tells us, again and again. (The anatomy and dissection image appears again in 276.) The aim of the section, which unfortunately proceeds once again by a series of too-quick arguments and merely suggestive examples, is to make us appreciate what Hegel takes to be the main if not sole function of reason—the comprehension of *wholes*. In one passage which suggests the conclusion of the book as a whole, Hegel argues that “the concept” of a living thing is never the individual organism but “the real organic concept or the *whole*” (266), in other words, the whole species. (He says this in a brief discussion of reproduction, or “self-preservation in general” (*ibid.*)). Thus we can anticipate too the over-all strategy of the long third part on “Reason”: the relative insignificance of individuals, the over-all significance of the whole human world, as a single unity.

The section, given this strategy, is defined by a series of polemics, not unlike the first chapters of the book (“Consciousness”), all of which are aimed to show that: (1) living beings must be understood as self-contained teleological systems and cannot be understood by dissection or abstraction; (2) living beings must be understood in terms of their activities and purposes and not by way of general laws, which in every case turn out to be “trivial”; and (3) living beings cannot be understood if we divide them into “inner movements” (consciousness, vital force, instincts, drives and purposes) and “outer expression” or “outer shape” (body organs, biological form, observable behavior).

142. If specism—our unwarranted prejudice in favor of *Homo sapiens*—is now our latest Sin, can phylism—the unwarranted preference for Chordate animals—be far behind?

The conclusion, however, is far more negative, or rather "indeterminate," than most; we are left at the end with a conclusion that living beings cannot be comprehended by laws or analysis or by reference to their "inner" purposes either. And then the dialectic just stops.¹⁴³

The section begins with Hegel's reminder that the "observation of nature" must have "the significance of a *universal*, not of a *sensuous particular*" (244). What we are aware of in "Reason" are *our* distinctions between things and types of things, but this leaves us with the all-important question whether these distinctions also have a reality in the things we distinguish. How do we know we are making the right or the best distinctions, instead of picking out "superficial" similarities and differences? It is important to remember that the system of biological taxonomy invented by Carl Linnaeus was less than a century old, and Lamarck had only recently developed his quasi-evolutionary theory about acquired *changes* in species. Thus the problem of description and classification in biology looms large at the very beginning of Hegel's discussion of science, for it is clear to him that taxonomy is not just a question of naming¹⁴⁴ but has built into it the entire systematic account of the subject matter; we do not first classify things and then find the laws connecting them; our anticipation of such laws enters into the classification itself (246). In modern terms, a philosopher of science would say that what counts as an "observation term" in a given theory is itself part of the theory. There are no observables as such; in one context one might sensibly talk about "seeing an electron" (in a cloud chamber) but in another context talk about electrons only as "theoretical constructs."

It cannot be said that Hegel deals with these difficult questions either deeply or clearly. What he says is essentially that our sense of distinction is aided by the objects themselves, which "separate themselves from others" (ibid.). This might be construed as a concession to realism, but what he has in mind here is that we distinguish different species of animals by the fact that they tend to avoid each other, refuse to (or cannot) mate, and we define a species by the fact that its members can and do mate. This principle of differentiation leads Hegel to comment that plants, which are capable of asexual reproduc-

143. It is here at the end, not throughout the section, that Findlay's lament, "for those who seek a strict deductive necessity . . . Hegel may well be said to laugh at their pains," seems to apply. But Hegel never promises "deductions," only "comprehension," and the gaps in the dialectic can be as meaningful as the "logical" transitions, if they are interpreted to mean that Hegel thinks that there is nothing more to be said.

144. Adam to Eve: "Let's call that one a hippopotamus."

Eve: "Why?"

Adam: "Because it looks more like a hippopotamus than anything else we've seen today."

tion and growth from cut-off parts, are therefore less complete in themselves and not so clearly demarcated as animals, and inorganic substances are even less so. (This is a view Hegel expresses at some length in the *Philosophy of Nature*, para 343 ff.) When things do not “separate themselves,” “this gives rise to conflicting views . . . and since the thing itself does not remain identical with itself, classification is confused” (ibid.). The argument is curious, but we can anticipate what Hegel wants to do with it. He has already argued (in chapter 3) that the “forces” we suppose differentiate and unify things are in fact indistinguishable, and he now wants to set up a general argument that things can be properly identified or distinguished only by virtue of their own “inner activity,” which is not “observed.” But neither is this activity “supersensible,” in the sense discussed in chapter 3, nor is it merely our projection of laws about how a thing “ought” to behave (249). Here again Hegel has in mind the Kantian-Fichtean view of laws of understanding as nothing but our projections, rather than his own view (borrowed from Schelling) that we *share* activities with things, and thus (even as idealists) have to respect them in their own right (249). And to know them in their own right means,—knowing their “concept.”

Several times in the preceding pages, I have pointed out that “the Concept” for Hegel is not just a feature of consciousness but, at the same time, a feature of things in the world, which is to say, with both Kant and Hegel, that they are *real*, “objective,” and not by any means just “in our minds.” Thus Hegel tells us straightforwardly that what we seem to observe is itself actually “the Concept,” and not a single sensuous particular. He gives us a number of examples from physics; when we “see a stone fall to the ground” we do not refer just to this one “sensuous thing”; neither do we, in order to know about gravity, have “to make this experiment with every stone.” We might try this for a few times, Hegel says, inferring “by analogy” (actually, by induction) that *probably* it holds in other cases too. But, Hegel rightly points out, this is not what science is about—certain high-school science textbooks to the contrary. One could not even try the experiment once without a hypothesis, and the hypothesis already has built into it the general *concept* of gravitation. When we see a single stone “fall,” in other words, we *see gravity*, despite the fact that gravity is not a “thing” but a concept. (Again, the more modern way to put this would be to say that, once a theory is established, what were once theoretical constructs can now count as observables, and we see the phenomenon in their terms (250).)

Hegel gives similar examples with electricity and heat, neither of

which are “things,” nor bodies nor properties, and the conclusion in each case is that what we observe are universals, i.e. concepts, which, strictly speaking (that is, limiting what we “hear” or “see” to sensuous particulars such as a sound or a flash of red) we do not observe at all (251–53). But this is the only point Hegel wants to make in the *Phenomenology* about inorganic nature, despite his apparent interest in the subject at this time.¹⁴⁵ The text instead immediately moves to organic nature, “the organism” (254).

In discussing living teleological systems (that is, organisms), Hegel makes a point which has often been made in philosophy and the social sciences, namely, that one does not comprehend these by reference to *laws*, which are “impoverished” (255); we rather know them because we have “*understanding*” (*Verstehen*), not in the sense discussed in chapter 3 but rather in the later 19th-century sense which we here have called “empathy,” or what Hegel sometimes calls “instinct” (257). We watch a pigeon peck at the keyboard of some respectably sadistic Harvard psychologist’s apparatus, and it pecks harder still when the assistant varies the reward more erratically. We understand the bird’s behavior not because we now have a hypothesis about “intermittent reinforcement” or a set of generalizations about pigeons and what they tend to do in Harvard psychology laboratories; we understand because we ourselves work for rewards. We ourselves know what it is to be sporadically rewarded. We know what an “*End*” is (256), and we know about the ends of others not by laws but by “instinct” (257). That is, we “just know”; we know why an animal eats not because we first know about the nutritional needs of its body but because we ourselves get hungry we attribute hunger to the animal. In modern terms, we might say that Hegel could not be more opposed to behaviorism, which denies that “this *End*, *qua End*, is also *objective*, and therefore does not fall within the observing consciousness itself, but in another intelligence” (258). To formulate a law covering a small sampling of

145. In his Lectures of 1805–6, for example, the bulk of the course consisted of mechanics, space and time, chemistry, and the nature of physical bodies as well as “organics” and psychology (*Werke*, Pöggeler, ed. vols. 6, 7). It might also be pointed out, however, that Hegel here repeats his disdain for experimental science, with the claim that “the experimental consciousness” separates “*pure law*” from “sensuous being.” I gather that his claim is that experiments, in their aim to eliminate all variables but the factors being measured, totally eliminate the *context* in which such laws are established. The only defense I can see for this is that, if one believes as Hegel does in the systematic interconnection of all laws, then the idea of isolating a single law for testing distorts it, for it counts as a law only within the body of laws. But in terms of modern relativity physics, this perhaps naïve idealist argument gains some teeth, as soon as one considers the observer too as part of the system. But here, I think Hegel is being more anti-scientific than precocious, and it is not Heisenberg he is anticipating so much as he is expressing his own preference for “armchair speculation” over the dirty work in the laboratory.

an animal's behavior is one thing, but to know that that behavior is "in and for itself" purposive is to "understand" it, in the only sense that means anything. (One can imagine an oddly shaped bit of stuff—in a science fiction movie, for instance—whose movements might be studied in the fashion of the behaviorist, until, that is, we become convinced that it is, after all, a living being responding to its environment in purposive ways. Then, the behaviorist study stops, and *Verstehen* begins.)¹⁴⁶

The problem which defines Hegel's philosophy of nature and much of the *Phenomenology* too is the relationship between so-called "inner movement" and "outer expression" (262–63); it is the problem that concerned us with "force" in chapter 3, but then we were talking about Newtonian physical force whereas now we are talking about Schellingian teleological activity, the "organic unity" of the organism which is just as much "outer" as "inner" (263–64). Again, a somewhat wooden ontological puzzle can be reconstructed into a conceptual problem of profound proportions; when behaviorists talk about "observation" and refuse to postulate "intervening variables" (Clark Hull, for example) or "mental way-stations" (B.F. Skinner, notably) in-between observable stimuli and responses, they tend to ignore the fact that the identification of the stimulus (which is not just an aspect of the environment but an aspect *as experienced* by the organism) and the response (which is not just a movement of the body but a purposive action) already presuppose postulations about what's going on "inside" of the organism. But when anti-behaviorists insist on the actual presence of an *intention*, or an *End*, within the organism (in a pigeon?!), they lend themselves to similar difficulties: what is the relationship between the "inner" phenomenon and the "outer" expression, given that, by the very nature of the case, we can never observe the "inner" phenomenon for ourselves? This in turn leads Hegel toward the view that the "inner-outer" distinction itself is in error, a position he will argue, somewhat obscurely, through the rest of this section.

The problem that preoccupies Hegel here is that classic Cartesian question, the so-called "mind-body problem." This is obscured by Hegel's heavy reliance on the biological categories of his day, which he mentions, however, only to reject them. (The triad, "Sensibility, Irritability, and Reproduction," appears also in Schelling, who simply picked it up from current biology.) But this context also provides some very contemporary advances over the crude form in which Descartes posed

146. Cf. Taylor, *The Purpose of Behavior*, which he does not use, curiously enough, to interpret these passages in the *PG*, despite the fact that they are so sympathetic to his own views.

the problem. First of all, Hegel makes it into a very tangible problem in scientific explanation, not a metaphysical problem having to do with the technical notion of "substance." Second, he raises the question with regard to animals, who are not self-conscious, instead of in the first person—"How is my mind connected to my body?"—as in Descartes. Third, he does not talk vaguely about "the mind" or "the body" but rather deals in specific systems and correlations, between sensations ("Sensibility") and the nervous system. And fourth, he has already cast serious doubts on the possibility of any kind of *causal* connections or laws between the two, and this is also his conclusion here—that laws in this realm are bogus laws (278, 297).

Hegel also sees quite clearly, as many contemporary philosophers do not, that the problem arises not because the purported laws of psychoneurology are "too short-sighted" (269), that is, not advanced enough in present research. The apparent gap between a sensation, on the one hand, and some process in the central nervous system, on the other, will remain a mystery, so formulated, no matter how much information scientists acquire in the future.¹⁴⁷ Today, some philosophers who write about the topic refer to some final physiological function as "brain process in C-fibers," trusting all the while that some neurologist, perhaps not yet born, will fill in the "C." But Hegel is claiming, and I think rightly, that it does not matter whether you envision the nervous system as he did—as a total mystery (e.g. see his *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 363–64), or as a system of neurons as tiny tubes with some mysterious "quantity" flowing through them (as Freud believed in 1895¹⁴⁸) or as a system of selective membranes with fluctuating sodium and potassium concentrations, as we now believe. The question remains: How is the "inner" sensation connected with the "outer" organic bodily system?

Hegel's reply to this question, again very contemporary, is indirect; he intends to undermine the very terms in which the problem is formulated. He has already (in chapter 1) rejected the alleged "givenness" of sensations, and he has now rejected any view of living things (higher animals, anyway) which considers detached parts rather than the unified functioning of the whole. Thus the idea of an isolated "brain process," or for that matter, even the idea of "the nervous system" considered alone, is a bit of biological nonsense. Distinctions between the various systems are ultimately invalid (265–79) (though, to be sure, Hegel has no objection to the life sciences themselves.) The

147. P.T. Geach: "No amount of research can settle a conceptual confusion."

148. See, especially, his "Project for a Scientific Psychology," in *The Standard Edition of the Collected Works*, vol. 2.

objection here drives home this point by pursuing the argument on two fronts—by attacking the idea of “inner movement” in itself, in much the same terms that Hegel attacked “forces within” in chapter 3, and by attacking the mistake of treating biological systems as mere inorganic matter (which they can be only as dead, not living, beings).

One of Hegel’s arguments here, which he pursues at some length, is the difference between talking about some “inner” abstract principle in an inorganic body and the “inner movements” of an organism; his example is specific gravity (a measure of comparative density, in which water is given the unit “1.”) Specific gravity is the “inner aspect” (288) of the shape of a piece of rock, for example, but it is not, Hegel objects, a “true activity,” with essential relations with all other aspects of the material (289). A small piece, cut off, still has the same specific gravity; a small piece of a higher animal, however (the argument won’t work with flatworms, hydra, and sponges), loses its “inner movement,” that is, its life.

The argument concludes, inconclusively, with Hegel rejecting the reduction of the organic to the inorganic; “the inorganic inner is a simple inner which presents itself to perception as a property that merely is; . . . But the being-for-self of the living organism does not stand on one side in this way [i.e., “indifferent to its other sensuous properties”] over against its outer; on the contrary, it has in its own self the principle of *otherness*” (291). The “otherness” is its universal, its “genus” (species) and Hegel’s argument here takes the predictable turn that life is to be understood (as it is usually defined) as the ability to reproduce itself, to exist for the sake of the species rather than just for itself. The “inner” principle of living things, therefore, is not just a single measurement available to observers, but the vital instinct to preserve itself and its kind.

Hegel points out (dubiously) the infinite variety of biological shapes, all of them with the same “inner movement”—life (291–93), and so concludes, in typical Hegelian fashion, that organic nature really requires a concept of *life in general* (295), or *universal life* (293, 297), which is expressed in its myriad of aspects. Ultimately, the end of “Observing Nature” is not even “the organic as such, but in the universal individual”—the living Earth (296). Thus he reaches his intended universal, readying us for a reversal back to the individual in the next section. But we have lost the thread of our argument, which is an attack on the division of “inner” and “outer”, consciousness and its bodily manifestations. For this, let us skip the short polemic on “Laws of Thought” and move straight on to the notorious refutation of physiognomy and phrenology. Hegel’s attack on “Laws of Thought” is in fact already familiar to us, first, in his attack on the “arbitrary”

collection of laws utilized by Kant in his own analysis of the mind, second in Hegel's over-all rejection of deterministic psychology, in the name of "freedom." Thinking, Hegel says, can be comprehended only by the individual, and "psychological necessity" is nothing but an "empty phrase" (307).

The suspicious sub-section on these two "pretentious pseudo-sciences"¹⁴⁹ is actually entitled, "The Observation of the relation of self-consciousness to its immediate actuality" (185). The "immediate actuality" is the brain, and what Hegel is here considering is the mind-body problem in its most sophisticated version at the time. Physiognomy and phrenology (which were by no means so obviously "pseudo" as they seem to us now) were but two particular manifestations of a general suggestion with which Hegel is in qualified agreement—that the Cartesian distinction between self-consciousness (or simply, consciousness, "the mind") and its "immediate actuality" (the body, and in particular the brain and central nervous system) is invalid, and that the body is inseparably permeated with conscious activity, "the mind" necessarily embodied and permeated the body. (Even Descartes objected, in his reply to Gassendi concerning his Sixth Meditation, that the mind is not lodged in the body like a sailor in a ship.) What physiognomy and phrenology share is the supposition that mind is manifested *necessarily* in the body, not only in behavior but in the very shape of the body, the face, the bones of the skull. If these two attempts at science failed to identify a very plausible locus for these necessary manifestations, their supposition is still very much alive in contemporary neuro-psychology, which still assumes, though with increasing scepticism, that the various mental functions necessarily have their locus in specific sections and even in particular anatomical sub-sections of the brain.

Hegel's actual arguments against the pseudo-sciences are wholly familiar and not very important to us here; these "sciences" are rarely accurate but hide this with a variety of excuses; every exception is explained away and the laws themselves are general enough so that they are ultimately "empty" (338).¹⁵⁰ What is important is the supposition that underlies these pseudo-sciences, what they are trying to do

149. J.N. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 106.

150. The best discussion of Hegel's analysis of physiognomy and phrenology is Alasdair MacIntyre's "Hegel on Faces and Skulls," in his *Hegel* (pp. 219–36). The most concise characterization of these "sciences" themselves, however, belongs to Ambrose Bierce, in his *Devil's Dictionary* (1881):

Phrenology, n. The science of picking the pocket through the scalp. It consists in locating and exploiting the organ that one is a dupe with.

Physiognomy, n. The art of determining the character of another by the resemblances and differences between his face and our own, which is the standard of excellence.

It is worth noting that Hegel also discusses the pseudo-sciences of palmistry and astrology in passing here, but he dismisses them because they have nothing to do with

and—what is usually ignored—what is *correct* about them. We are now considering only human life, and the “inner” becomes full-blown *intentions*; the “outer” now takes on a variety of forms, including full-fledged intentional *actions* as well as unintentional but conscious *gestures* and the more fixed and physiological aspects of the body. All of these together are called “expression,” and Hegel points out that every expression is both something over and above its intention and less than it (for example, when a person is clumsy and cannot do what he intends (312).) The question, then, is where we should look for the bodily expressions of intentions. Actions can be misleading, deceptive, or misfire. Gestures are more dependable, but they too can be faked, deceptive, and occasionally misfire (for example, they can be misconstrued (*ibid.*)). What we need therefore is a more “passive” kind of expression, one which cannot be varied according to the whim or mishaps of the subject. Thus we come to look at the more fixed physiological features as some source of insight into people’s “real” character, whatever their overt behavior and expressions. The face is a reasonable candidate, for it must be admitted that we do place enormous stock—more than we would admit in a philosophical discussion—on “first impressions” and the mere appearance of a person. But, Hegel points out, this isn’t very dependable and, besides, knowing that someone has a certain *capacity*, for example, to be a murderer, is not yet to say that he will be one (320). So faces too are too “superficial” and, at the same time, not sufficiently informative. Bones are another suggestion, since the skull is as close as can be to the physiological center of consciousness, the brain. Thus the attraction of phrenology.

Why not look for these manifestations in the brain itself? Because Hegel’s generation knew virtually nothing about the workings of the brain, except that it is, somehow, the organ of consciousness. This leads him to say that “the *being* of Spirit which, in the brain, is reflected into itself, is itself again only a middle term between Spirit’s pure essence and its corporeal articulation” (327). In other words, the brain is not only *close* to consciousness (“Spirit”); it is indistinguishable from it, “Spirit . . . reflected into itself” in physical form. What Hegel is here toying with is that complex of theories which are today debated as the “identity theory” of mind-body, not that the mind is identical with the brain *simpliciter*, perhaps, but that, at some point, one has to hypothesize that a physiological process and a conscious process (for example, a particular memory or emotion) are *the same thing*.

“expression.” The topic here, in other words, is “expression” (“inner” and “outer”), not pseudo-science in general.

This is not to deny that the relationship between them is still logically *contingent* (342) as well as “only a middle term” (327) but, nevertheless, there is a point at which (according to this theory) there is no longer any justification in distinguishing them.¹⁵¹ This would be Spirit’s “indifference point,” in Schelling’s language, that level of explanation where Spirit and nature are no longer distinct or distinguishable.

Instead of looking for clues to one’s character in the brain (and it is essential to remember that a physiologist in Hegel’s time would not have had the slightest idea what to look for), the phrenologist looks at the “*inert, enduring existence*,” which is the “necessary aspect of the spiritually organic being” (328), namely, the skull and vertebral column. Now it is easy enough to guess Hegel’s criticism of the theory that a “bump is connected with a particular passion, property, etc.” (336), namely, that any number of factors could cause such bumps, that there is no evidence that such bumps follow law-like patterns, and, ultimately, that character is “*indifferent*” to its “outer existence” (330). But what is not so easily noticed is Hegel’s recognition that there is something profound in this admittedly “bad” science (340); even though “this final stage of Reason in its observational role is its worst” (*ibid.*), it recognizes, as many more respectable sciences do not, the *inseparability* of consciousness and its expressions, the fact that a disembodied spirit is an unintelligible notion and that by the same token the examination of the living body, whether brain or bone, cannot proceed without an integrated view of its function in the living being. It may be “disgraceful” to have the “irrational, crude thought which takes a bone for the reality of self-consciousness” (345), but no phrenologist has ever been that naïve. Contemporary neuropsychology, on the other hand, is still pervaded with reductive materialists who insist that “consciousness is *nothing but* the brain” (e.g. Carl Sagan, in the introduction to the *Dragons of Eden*.)¹⁵²

I think it is a fair question to ask whether they, not the crude phrenologists whom Hegel explicitly attacks, might not be fitting targets for the general argument of this curious section. The upshot is this: insofar as one tries to sunder the integrity of the living organism into components—whether physical or metaphysical—one either becomes incapable of explaining their function and unity or becomes committed to some form of reductionism. (From the subjective idealist side,

151. On the so-called “contingent identity theory” see, for example, Jerome Shaffer, *The Philosophy of Mind* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968). See also Crawford Elder, *Appropriating Hegel* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen Univ. Press, 1980), for a well-worked-out version of Hegel’s theory (based on the *Logic*).

152. Sagan, *Dragons of Eden*, p. 7.

the thesis is that the body is nothing but the mind, “Brain fibers are no more than the hypothetical reality existing only in one’s head” (346). The conclusion is no more absurd.) The object of knowledge is a unified teleological whole, which is to be understood only through its own activity. To see ourselves as anything less—as mere mechanical bodies, for example, rather than spiritual (living) beings—is to be just as crude, Hegel suggests with a hint of naughtiness, as someone who treated the (male) genitals, “the organ of nature’s highest fulfillment” as the mere “organ of urination” (ibid.).

On that sexy note we turn back to the other theme of the *Phenomenology*, the realm of “self-consciousness” and our practical engagements in the world.

Chapter Eight

Self-Consciousness: Desire, Dependency, and Freedom (chapter 4)

Strictly speaking, you have no consciousness of things, but only consciousness of consciousness of things.

Consciousness connects with reality in action; I possess reality and comprehend it, because it lies within my own being, it is native to myself.
—Fichte, *Vocation of Man*

“With Self-Consciousness,” Hegel informs us, “we have entered the native realm of truth” (167). In fact we have entered the realm of Fichte’s philosophy and, more importantly, we have entered the realm of the most famous part of the *Phenomenology*, the realm of the “Master and Slave” (*Lordship and Bondage*, *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*). These few pages have inspired no less brilliant admirers than Karl Marx and Jean-Paul Sartre¹ and it is with visible relief that most commentators launch into the first section of the *Phenomenology* with which they can feel fully confident. Suddenly, we think that we know what we’re talking about: two people (ostensibly men, though they are called “self-

1. Marx’s debt to Hegel, of course, is now widely recognized, due to the pro-Hegelian sympathies of the Marxists of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse in particular (*Reason and Revolution*). Although Marx talks about the *Philosophy of Right* at much greater length, his admiration was directed much more to the *PG*, the Master-Slave parable in particular. See, e.g., David McClellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). Jean-Paul Sartre used the Hegelian parable to begin his long and somewhat paranoid discussion of “Being-for-Others” in *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956). Although Sartre’s analysis is usually interpreted as a psychological study, it is just as much and even more an ontology of selfhood, a terrifying study of the vicissitudes of romantic love, sex, hatred, masochism, sadism, and indifference, without a hint of sentimentality. In Sartre’s formulation, the essence of all interpersonal relations is “conflict”—the attempt of each person to assert himself or herself as “absolute freedom” and turn the other into an “object” which is no longer a threat to that freedom.

consciousness") meet for the first time and immediately begin to fight for "recognition" (*Anerkennen*). One wins, one loses. And then, ironically, the loser emerges the winner. It is simple, straightforward, striking, prophetic—unlike the tedious interplay of "forces" we suffered through only a few pages before (in chapter 3) and unlike the abstruse warblings about "desire" that immediately precede it, by way of an introduction.² Thus Findlay gladly declares it "more lucid and illuminating" than all that has come before and, in tacit contrast, he calls it "deservedly admired."³ Alexandre Kojève goes one step further and simply weaves the whole story of the *Phenomenology* around it, beginning with "desire" and all but pretending that the first three chapters of the book do not even exist.⁴

The Master-Slave parable (as I shall refer to it) is, of course, of immense importance to the *Phenomenology* and to Hegel's philosophy in general. It appears, in virtually the same form, in every one of his works on "Spirit," including his Jena lectures of the same period⁵ and the "Philosophy of Spirit" of the later *Encyclopaedia*. In one sense, there is no problem of interpretation here—unlike some of the earlier chapters; at least we are certain about what Hegel is talking about—some primitive confrontation of two primordial persons. The question is: How does this fit in with the rest of the book and Hegel's philosophy? What is it supposed to mean in terms of the over-all "dialectic," and why—its intrinsic fascination aside—should it occur in the *Phenomenology*, and occur at this particular point (rather than in the chapter on "Spirit," to which it would seem more akin)? Indeed, even the most conscientious commentators tend to treat the celebrated section as a major break in the text, the sudden and totally unexplained appearance of the "social" dimension of human experience which just as suddenly disappears into a discussion of the philosophy of the stoics.⁶

On the one hand, I would agree with Kojève that the *Phenomenology* could have begun with the section on "desire"⁷ (just as it could have

2. Richard Norman, for example, simply dismisses the entire section on "desire" in his *Hegel's Phenomenology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977) and calls it "extremely unrewarding," "unintelligible," concluding "I shall say little about it" (p. 47); Ivan Soll, *Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics*, p. 10ff.

3. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 93.

4. Alexandre Kojève, *An Introduction to Reading Hegel*, trans. J.H. Nichols, ed. Alan Bloom (New York, 1969).

5. In the lectures, however, the emphasis is on the *social* origins of relationships.

6. For example, Soll, pp. 9, 14f.; Findlay, *Hegel*; Hyppolite, pp. 162ff.

7. The enthusiastic over-emphasis on the importance of "desire" in Kojève's interpretation I attribute to a peculiar French fashion, to which Kojève himself mightily contributed: it includes Sartre, of course, and, today, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, for whom the word has become the fetish that "freedom" was in the post-war, more Cartesian days. See, for example, Lacan's excursions into Hegel in his *Ecrits* (Seminar lectures, 1970).

begun with primitive family life in "Spirit" or the elementary forms of religious experience in chapter 7). The *Phenomenology* is a panorama with a number of potential starting points, and primitive desire is certainly one of them. But, on the other hand, the point is that Hegel did *not* so begin. In our reading, the transition from the Kantian forms of "understanding" to "desire" and "Master and Slave" has to be accounted for, not ignored or denied. But there is a straightforward progression here which can be understood in a word, and the word is—*Fichte*.

Anyone who has read Fichte will recognize him here; the pragmatic turn is his; the Master-Slave parable itself is (most immediately) from Fichte; the notion of "Self-Certainty" is pure Fichte; and the whole idea of self-consciousness and conflict as "the native realm of truth" is from Fichte. Of course, this is not all that it is, but neither should one treat the Master-Slave parable out of context, cutting it off entirely from the rest of the book.

Perhaps the first point to make about the place of the parable in the *Phenomenology* is that it is not, in any way, about the "social" dimension of human experience.⁸ It is, Hegel tells us, the first appearance of "Spirit," the first conception of interpersonal unity (177), but the participants in the parable do not know this. In the philosophical parlance that utterly dominated the philosophical context of both Fichte and Hegel, the initial confrontation of two more-or-less "independent" persons in "the state of nature" is emphatically *pre-social*, *before* the formation of society. In fact, in Hobbes, in Rousseau, and in Fichte, it is this pre-social confrontation, whether nasty, brutish and short as in Hobbes, or compassionately "indifferent" as in Rousseau, that prefigures the formation of society through some mythical agreement or contract. The master-slave parable is Hegel's contribution to that lively and popular debate, but it is not, therefore, the first appearance of the "social." Indeed, it should strike any reader who thinks so as quite odd that, instead of moving straight on to "Spirit" and the nature of society as such, Hegel should spend another one and a half chapters, 150 pages and nearly 250 paragraphs before doing so.

The second preliminary point to make is that the Master-Slave parable is not, as Marx and Sartre later reinterpret it, about "freedom." The title of the section, in fact, is "Independence and Dependence"; "Freedom" does not appear until the following section (on "Stoicism, Skepticism and Unhappy Consciousness"). Freedom is a concept that emerges *from* the master-slave confrontation; it is not its object; the

8. This view is taken for granted, in a few cases argued, by Findlay, Marcuse, Kojève, Hyppolite, and Soll, to name but a few.

slave does not long for his freedom, and the end of the story is not, though it might warm our liberal hearts, the “liberation” of the slave.

The third point is that we should not expect Hegel to give us more than the parable is designed to exemplify. If indeed it were, as Kojève and others have read it, a study in the dynamics of social relations or a psychological study of domination and submission, then we could quite rightly criticize Hegel for giving us so little by way of detail.⁹ Thus commentators have debated with one another—Why does the master not kill the slave? And why does the slave choose servitude to death? Why do they have to fight to the death at all? And what is it about the slave’s condition (his fear of the master, his fear of death, his relationship to his work) that renders him ultimately independent?¹⁰ Indeed, these are fascinating questions, but they are for the most part inessential to the point of the parable, which is *the formation of self-consciousness*. The precise details of interpersonal confrontation are not important to Hegel’s purpose, any more than the precise nature of the “forces” in “Force and the Understanding” (ch. 3) were essential to Hegel’s analysis of scientific explanation (*à la* Newton). It didn’t really matter whether he was discussing gravity or electromagnetism or chemical bonding to make his point, and the exact socio-dynamics of interpersonal relations are not required for Hegel to make his point here either—that self-consciousness becomes determinate only through interaction with another self-consciousness. (Hegel explicitly makes this connection in ¶ 184). For the brutal details, I cannot recommend anything better than Sartre’s brilliant dialectic on “Being-for-Others” in *Being and Nothingness*, Part III. But for an understanding of the *Phenomenology* it is far more important to look back and ahead, to the earlier sections of the book and Fichte’s philosophy and to the study of Stoicism etc. that follow.

The Master-Slave parable is not a condensed epic about the importance of work and the inevitable mastery of the working class. It is not a distilled and overly abstract psychological study of servitude and oppression. It is in brief an ontological theory about the nature of “selfhood” in which the whole history of philosophy, and in particular the Cartesian-Leibnizian vision of the fully formed individual ego is summarily rejected. Surely that is enough to do in less than nine pages.

9. Soll, for example, makes this lament, attacking Findlay’s attempts to provide the arguments for Hegel (Soll, p. 16ff). He rightly criticizes Findlay for his “overly epistemological” interpretation, insisting instead on the “plainly practical character” of the section, despite the epistemological idiom of Hegel’s discussion (pp. 9–10,16).

10. For example, Kaufmann, p. 153; Findlay, p. 96, Josiah Royce, p. 177, Soll, p. 18ff.

*Self-Certainty and the History of the Self—as Monad,
as Cogito, as Everything*

There is no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed in its inner being by any other created thing, since there is no possibility of transposition within it . . . The Monads have no windows through which anything can come in or go out. —Leibniz, *Monadology*

I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it. —Descartes, *Meditation II*

I am indeed conscious of myself as an independent being; . . . I have immediate knowledge of myself alone. —Fichte, *Vocation of Man*

Himself as everything! How does Mrs. Fichte put up with it?
—H. Heine

To understand the “sudden” appearance of another person in the *Phenomenology*, it is first of all necessary to look back with fascination and dismay at the whole history of modern philosophy, from Descartes and Locke to Kant, in which other people, other self-consciousnesses, are silently absent. Indeed it is the assumption—not even pondered sufficiently to be called a pre-supposition—that what is “immediately” known to us are our *individual selves as knowers*. For Descartes it is the *Cogito*—“I think, therefore I am”; for Kant it is the “transcendental unity of apperception”—the “possibility of the ‘I think’ accompanying all of my representations.” In John Locke’s varied deliberations concerning self-identity in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* the possibility that the “self” is essentially a social creation rather than a feature of personal experience is not even considered, and in Hume’s denial of the existence of a self, the idea that he might be looking for it in the wrong place—namely, in his own consciousness—never even occurs to him:

There are some philosophers who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our self; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence, and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity . . . Unluckily, all of these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience which is pleaded for them . . .

I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and I can never observe anything but the perception, . . .¹¹

The most spectacular assertion of this view of the isolated, individ-

11. *Treatise on Human Nature*, Selby-Bigge, ed., iv, i.

ual, largely perceptual self could be found in Germany. A century before Hegel, Leibniz had developed his theory of *monads*, each of them totally self-contained, literally the whole world within itself programmed ("in pre-established harmony") by God. There is some indication, perhaps, that Leibniz's theory is not intended to be a theory of *self-identity* at all,¹² but the image deeply affected every German philosopher following him. Consciousness was a self-enclosed realm. On reflection, consciousness became self-consciousness and, upon transcendental reflection (as in Kant) it came to see itself as not only the recipient but the *source* of the world it perceived. It is in this Leibnizian-Kantian light that we must understand the apparent arrogance of Fichte's statements; "I am wholly my own creation" and "whatever has an existence for me has it through myself."¹³ This is not pathological egomania¹⁴; it is the philosophical tradition. The "I" is everything. And it is worth noting that in every one of these philosophical giants, in Germany from Leibniz to Fichte, in England from Locke to Russell, in France from Descartes to Sartre, the self ("for itself") is the beginning of philosophy; the existence of other people is hardly even mentioned, that is, until they suddenly start doing ethics (as in Kant's second *Critique*) or until other people are presented as a *problem* (as in John Stuart Mill's "problem of other minds" or in Jean-Paul Sartre's "Reef of Solipsism"). Even in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the existence of other selves plays a minimal role, and then late in the game.¹⁵

This is the philosophical background against which the appearance of two people instead of just one in the Master-Slave parable must be understood. It is not the unwarranted appearance of the "social"; it is not the intrusion of another person into the fully formed world of self-consciousness.¹⁶ It is Hegel's bold demonstration of the radical view that, without interpersonal interaction and the mutual demand for what he calls "recognition," there is no "self" and no "self-consciousness." There is no self-enclosed monad; there is no possibility of a *Cogito ergo sum*. Hume is right in his insistence that he can find

12. See, e.g., Ruth Saw, *Leibniz* (London: Penguin, 1954).

13. Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, pp. 103, 108.

14. For example, George Santayana's amusing but wholly undependable *The Ego in German Philosophy*; on Hegel: "he must pretend that his egoism was not egotism, but identity with the absolute" (p. 91).

15. In Part III, "The Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical" (pp. 218–87), the "not-self" is usually impersonal and only rarely given the status of another self. Indeed, considering the highly *moral* nature of the work, the absence of almost all mention of relations to others is no less than shocking.

16. Soll: "in the social sphere, but in an anti-social way" (p. 17). And George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage,'" in MacIntyre, *Hegel*, esp. pp. 196–97.

no immediate self in his consciousness (though Hegel does not discuss him on this topic, even in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*).¹⁷ And knowledge is not, as in virtually every other modern philosopher, a relation between me (as “knower”) and the world (as “known”). If one reads Hegel’s *Phenomenology* not as history (in which case the whole section on “Self-Consciousness” is absurdly misplaced) but as a conceptual series of forms and theories, the function of which is to give us a comprehensive picture of human experience, then the Master-Slave section is intended as a corrective to the view that we have so far (both in the *Phenomenology* and in the history of philosophy) assumed to be obviously true: that the self is essentially a cognitive self known through (or in or “behind”) experience and that it is essentially an individual self, a concrete particular that is recognized through immediate intuition.

In our Chapter 7, we looked in some detail—as much as is sanctioned by the text—at Hegel’s Fichtean pragmatic move; knowledge is not, Hegel argues, exclusively a matter of “theory.” It is also practical, not only in its consequences but in its sources and its parameters. Indeed, in Fichte, the pragmatic turn itself becomes total: “If my knowledge revealed to me nothing but knowledge, I would be defrauded of my whole life.”¹⁸ For Fichte too, the self is not a particular, determinate entity. Indeed he argues that individual selves, along with the “not-self,” are created by the self which is, itself, indeterminate. But for Fichte along with the whole tradition since Descartes, the self itself is an immediate object of knowledge, indeed, the ultimate object of knowledge, “certain of itself” in the sense that it could not possibly be questioned.¹⁹

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel spells out the cryptic references of “Self-Certainty” in chapter 4. Descartes and Fichte are treated in much the same way: “Descartes begins, just as Fichte did later on, with the ‘I’ as indubitably certain; I know that something is presented in me.”²⁰ In fact, Descartes is rendered more sympathetically, perhaps, than he ought to be. The *Cogito* of the *Meditations* seems obviously enough to be an individual ego (if something less than a whole person). But in the *Lectures*, Hegel tells us, speaking of Descartes;

17. His discussion of Hume is in *Lectures*, trans. Haldane and Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1955), vol. 3, pp. 369–75.

18. *Vocation of Man*, p. 93.

19. *Wiss.*, p. 93ff., “First Unconditioned Principle.”

20. *Lectures*, 3, p. 228.

The "I" has significance here as thought, not as individuality of self-consciousness. . . . hence the immediate certainty of thought. Certainty is only knowledge as such in its pure form of self-relating.²¹

It is with Descartes that "modern philosophy" begins²² and Fichte with whom it begins to reach its modern completion (which is in Hegel, of course).

Self-consciousness does not entirely begin in chapter 4; the "I" has been with us since "Sense-Certainty" (100–102, especially). Descartes's *Cogito* and certainly the empirically discovered particular of John Locke's self (which Hume couldn't find) more properly belong to that discussion. The self of "Sense-Certainty" is uncritically assumed to be a bare particular, a knowing self, which is sufficiently unproblematic so that all of our attention is turned to the nature of the object of knowledge, which is shown not to be a particular at all (90–110). A similar argument is advanced against the "I" (102) in which it too is said to be a universal and indeterminate ("everyone is equally 'I'"), but so briefly that it must be considered there as but a foretaste of a more massive set of considerations yet to come (if also briefly and obscurely presented) in chapter 4. The "I" is not an individual "I" after all; it is, or tries to be, *everything*. This is certainly not to be ascribed to Descartes; it is pure Fichte, and no one else: "Nothing is more insupportable to me than to be merely by another, for another, through another; I must be something for myself and by myself alone."²³

Descartes worried about how he could infer from consciousness and its "thoughts" to the reality of things "outside" of him; Fichte, a thorough idealist, does not worry about this—"whatever has existence has it through myself"²⁴ and "Strictly speaking, you have no consciousness of things, but only a consciousness of a consciousness of things",²⁵ which Hegel summarizes as:

When I philosophize, I make my ordinary consciousness itself my object, because I make a pure category of my consciousness; I know what my ego is doing, and thus I get behind my ordinary consciousness. Fichte thus defines philosophy as the artificial consciousness, as the consciousness of consciousness.²⁶

21. Ibid. 227.

22. Ibid. 166, 220ff.

23. *Vocation of Man*, p. 95.

24. Ibid. 108.

25. Ibid. 55.

26. *Lectures*, vol. 3, p. 484.

And in the *Phenomenology*;

With that first moment [recognition of things], self-consciousness is in the form of *consciousness*, and the whole expanse of the sensuous world is preserved for it, but at the same time only as connected with the second moment, the unity of self-consciousness with itself. (167)

Fichte does not deny the existence of “the sensuous world”; he only says that this world exists by being “posited” by the self. The self needs opposition to define itself, or as Hegel puts it in the *Lectures*, “the ego must not remain barren.”²⁷ The self itself, as Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology*, cannot remain as a “motionless tautology” (i.e. “Ego = Ego” or “I = I,” as Fichte sometimes stated his first principle²⁸) or, in the *Lectures*, an “abstract undetermined identity.”²⁹ The self “posits” the “not-self,” the sensuous world. It is worth noting that Hegel also attributes this move to Descartes (which is certainly not justified by the text) when he says that “the celebrated *Cogito ergo sum* is Thought and Being inseparably bound together”³⁰ (III 228). In defense of Fichte’s move, he curiously comments:

This other is the negative of the ego: thus when Fichte called it the non-ego he was expressing himself in a very happy, suitable and consistent manner. [!] There has been a good deal of ridicule cast on the ego and non-ego; the expression is new, and therefore to us Germans it seems strange at first. But the French say *moi* and *Non-moi* without finding anything laughable in it.³¹

In the *Phenomenology*, of course, Fichte does not emerge as “happy” at all, for it is his initial “positing” of the distinction between self and not-self and what Hegel too freely translates into “appearance and truth” (167) that leads us, in the course of this chapter, to the most “unhappy” of consciousnesses.³²

For Fichte (but not Descartes), the self, though immediately known by “intuition,” has to *prove* itself. It will find itself (that is, become

27. Ibid. 484.

28. The “A = A” formula is derived from Leibniz (see pp. 67). God, in Leibniz’s philosophy, knows all truths as necessary and, all necessary truths are ultimately equivalent. Thus, for God, or for an absolute Ego, everything is identical to everything else, or “A = A.”

29. *Lectures*, vol. 3.

30. Ibid. 228.

31. Ibid. 488–89.

32. Fichte does not use this distinction, since he rejects the Kantian dualism of phenomenon (appearance) and noumenon (thing in itself). Indeed, even in his more popular and initially Cartesian *Vocation of Man*, this distinction plays virtually no role at all. But the idea that Fichte ignored the “truth” of knowledge, in his zealous pursuit of the practical, is of course the main point of both Schelling’s and Hegel’s rejection of Fichte’s philosophy.

determinate) only through conflict and struggle. Thus the concepts of conflict and striving become central to Fichte's *Wissenschaftlehre*. Struggle against what? The not-self, of course, and it is the unresolved "opposition" between them that leads Hegel, from his early *Differenz*-essay of 1801 until his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, to ultimately reject Fichte's philosophy as "unsystematic." In other words, he never achieves that vision of ultimate harmony that had always been Hegel's ideal, which remains his ideal in the *Phenomenology* and throughout his life. (Yet, it is Fichte who insists too: "It is the vocation of our race to unite itself into a single body."³³)

Life is struggle, Fichte tells us, and despite the distant ideal of harmony, it is clear that, without "opposition" life would have no meaning at all.

This would seem to pre-figure the life-and-death struggle between the soon-to-be master and slave right at the heart of Fichte's philosophy, but this turns out not to be so. In the *Wissenschaftlehre* there is precious little mention of other people, and insofar as they are mentioned, they are "self-existent, free substantive beings, wholly independent of me." The obvious consequence (given Fichte's insistence on being "everything") is an inevitable conflict between individuals, but this does not emerge in the *Wissenschaftlehre*. Even in *The Vocation of Man*, we get only: "It is not nature but freedom itself by which the greatest and most terrible disorders are produced; man is the cruelest enemy of man."³⁴

The struggle for self is essentially a struggle against the impersonal not-self and against the "counter-striving of the not-self." It is not at all clear that this struggle involves a struggle between persons, and Fichte "deduces" not conflict but rather respect and morality—the ends of "practical reason" à la Kant. The life-and-death struggle only begins with Fichte's ethics which, strangely enough, is just as distinct from his theory of "knowledge" as it is in Kant, whom Fichte criticizes for just this separation.

The struggle with the not-self produces *feeling* for Fichte, "longing" as well as "desire."³⁵ This, of course, is the link with "desire" in chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's argument there—like all of the arguments in this chapter—should strike us as shockingly short; he says:

The antithesis of its appearance and its truth has, however, for its essence only the truth, viz. the unity of self-consciousness with itself;

33. *Vocation of Man*, p. 120.

34. *Ibid.* 117.

35. *Wiss.*, pp. 218ff. esp. 254–71.

this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is *Desire* in general. (167)

Taken at face value, this is unintelligible, but with Fichte as our guide, we can easily enough understand the move. It is by opposing oneself to other things and then “negating their otherness”—e.g. by eating them or by buying them or by declaring them one’s own “property”—that we achieve a sense of self. Thus it was a common argument of the day (and it is still dominant) that private property is nothing less than the definition (not merely an extension of) the self; it is our “negation” of the natural world around us which makes us most human. We can “negate” in conceptual ways unimaginable to animals; a dog can negate a piece of meat by chewing it, but he can’t “negate its otherness” by buying it at the super-market. For the dog, possession (negation of otherness) requires physical command; we, on the other hand, have even “negated the otherness” of the Heavens, by naming the stars and understanding them, thus making them, in some sense “our own.” (This sounds far-fetched, but Hegel’s theory of knowledge involves “owning” the world in precisely this sense, and it is a view that we find again and again in Nietzsche, in Jean-Paul Sartre, and in Einstein, to name but a few.)

Hegel’s “argument,” in other words, is but a condensation of Fichte’s picture of self against not-self, which is to be *practically* understood not so much in terms of knowledge as *feeling* and desire. It is feeling and desire that together make up *life*.³⁶ What Fichte and Hegel call “life,” however, is *unity* of the self and not-self; it is a *process* (171), a “universal fluid medium” (ibid.) which divides itself up and takes on separate “moments” (ibid.). It is here that we get Hegel’s outrageous set of leaps from this Fichtean point to his odd thesis that what we desire is necessarily also a “living thing” to his all-important conclusion that; “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” (175). I have tried to make some sense of this set of transitions in the preceding chapter. Let me now try to make some good sense out of the conclusion.

The Origins of Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only by being acknowledged. (178)

36. Fichte, *Wiss.* p. 262; Hegel, *PG* 169 f.

If one begins with the traditional view of the self as a particular, "self-existent" and autonomous monad, which knows itself immediately and the world only "mediately," this set of transitions is absurd. The appearance of "another self-consciousness" in particular seems sudden and arbitrary. In fact, Hegel himself confuses the issue in his terminology, since he is perhaps too quick to use the term "self-consciousness" when it is not at all clear that there is as yet any such thing. At the beginning of "Self-Certainty," we have a concept of self not much more advanced than the conception of self in "Sense-Certainty"; it is less particular and less defined in terms of knowledge, but it is still the "immediately given". But like the "this" of "Sense-Certainty," the "I" of "Self-Certainty" is quickly reduced to an empty gesture, a philosophical grunt, a "motionless tautology." To say this, again as Hegel said of the objects of "Sense-Certainty," is to say that the "I" is really nothing at all. It is a process which has yet to be initiated, and the question that defines the whole of this chapter is just this: *how does the concept of self-consciousness ever arise?* This in essence challenges what Fichte (and everyone before him) simply took for granted, the existence of consciousness as self-consciousness. Monads, the *cogito*, and Fichte's "self as everything" thesis just seem to beg the question, and begin where, at most, they ought to end.

The *Phenomenology*, from beginning to end, is a conceptual interplay of what Hegel calls "forms of consciousness." It is important to remind ourselves of this, especially here, where the text so readily lends itself to interpretation as a historical or a psychological progression, in which case it becomes almost unintelligible. One can, of course, ask why a creature should advance from mere desire to desire for recognition, but this empirical question is none of Hegel's concern and, in any case, it is probably unanswerable. Kojève, notably, treats this part of the *Phenomenology* as a historical-social progression, but this is a mistake even if one interprets the Master-Slave parable (as I intend to) as Hegel's version of the "state of nature" allegory presented by Rousseau and Hobbes, among others. Indeed, in a long and impossibly obscure excursus in his "Natural Law" essay a few years before, Hegel goes on and on against any such "empirical" interpretation of the origins of civil society.³⁷ This is a *conceptual* progression, to be understood in terms of the adequacy of forms, not the circumstantial emergence of humanity in history. Clark Butler advances an interesting interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as a Freudian devel-

37. *Natural Law*, trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), pp. 64–76.

opment from narcissistic infancy ("desire"), devoid of recognition of other people and aware of only one's own needs, to the first glimmer of others (Mother), and then the trauma of Oedipus (Master and Slave) and various defense mechanisms (Stoicism, Skepticism, and "Unhappy Consciousness") leading up to adolescence.³⁸ But though Hegel certainly thinks that the actual order of things will more or less follow the progression of forms he is tracing, the *Phenomenology* is by no means concerned with childhood or human development in general. What concerns Hegel here are the conceptual preconditions and presuppositions of self-consciousness.

The notion that self-consciousness has preconditions or presuppositions at all, of course, is just what Descartes, Fichte, and the others deny. Even for Kant, who makes some effort to "deduce" the transcendental ego, the precondition for self-consciousness seems to be only the existence of experience as such, not experience of any particular kind and, in particular, not *interpersonal* experience. Thus even Hegel's *question* is a rejection of the tradition, and his answer to it is so radical that even he has some trouble expressing it. Thus he speaks of self-consciousness coming "out of itself" (179), as if it were somehow "in itself" to begin with. The language here is Fichtean, but the result is confusion: there is no self, and no self-consciousness, before it comes "out of itself." Or as Sartre puts the same argument in his *Transcendence of the Ego*³⁹, the self is "out there, in the world, like the self of another." The argument is that there can be no (phenomenological) theory of consciousness which is not also a theory of self-consciousness. (This much is virtually a conceptual truth,—"I cannot talk about *my* consciousness unless I am also conscious of *my* being conscious.") Less trivially, there can be no description of self-consciousness which is not at the same time a discussion of one's relations with other people.

J.N. Findlay, in his interpretation of this section, provides the argument that a second self-consciousness is necessary as a "mirror" for the first, a position which Ivan Soll rejects (unfairly, I think) as "infinitely obscure."⁴⁰ But if anything, Findlay's imagery is not radical enough, for one can quite properly ask what there is that can be reflected in the mirror to begin with. A dog or a cat can look in a mirror with complete indifference; they do not see themselves at all. Or more

38. In *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, vol. 36 (June 1976), esp. 507–14. The comparison with Freud is not intended as an interpretation as such, which Butler has provided at length in his very sympathetic *Hegel*.

39. Translated by Forrest Williams (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), p. 31.

40. Findlay, p. 94; Soll, p. 16.

philosophically, we might recall the dilemma of Sartre's character Estelle in *Hell*, in the play *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*);

(ESTELLE is powdering her face. She looks around for a mirror, fumbles in her bag, then turns toward GARCIN)

ESTELLE Pardon, sir, have you a mirror? (GARCIN does not answer)
Any sort of glass, a pocket mirror will do. (GARCIN remains silent)
Even if you won't speak to me, you might lend me a mirror.
(His head buried in his hands, GARCIN remains silent)

INEZ (Eagerly) Don't worry. I've a mirror in my bag. (She opens her bag, looks annoyed) It's gone! They must have taken it at the entrance.

ESTELLE How tiresome!

(ESTELLE shuts her eyes and sways, as if about to faint. INEZ runs forward and holds her up)

INEZ What's the matter?

ESTELLE (Opens her eyes and smiles) I feel so queer. (She pats herself)
Don't you ever feel that way too? When I can't see myself I begin to wonder if I really exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn't help.⁴¹

The mirror imagery in Findlay's suggestion seems backward; it is not that we need another person as the mirror for self-consciousness, but rather that the mirror is *derivative* of self-consciously being looked at by others, or, in grandmotherly phrase, "seeing yourself as others see you." Hegel does not say that we (as self-conscious) want to be recognized; he says that we cannot be self-conscious *unless* we are recognized. The argument here has been further worked out in this century, by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* and by Wittgenstein and more recently P.F. Strawson in *Individuals*, by George Herbert Mead and some latter-day pragmatists in America. Strawson puts the argument most succinctly when he insists that we can ascribe certain predicates ("P- or "person-Predicates") to oneself only if one is also prepared to apply them to others as well.⁴² Taken out of the linguistic idiom, the argument is that one cannot be *self*-conscious of oneself as a person unless one also recognizes the personal existence of others. Self-consciousness, in other words, presupposes consciousness of others *as* others, not just as things, as limitations of myself. "The world is my oyster" only once I have come out of my own shell, and it is only when other people begin to take things away from me that I first get the conception "this is *mine*." This, of course, is precisely Fichte's thesis too, except that, for him, self-consciousness is already presup-

41. From *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. S. Gilbert (New York: Vintage, 1947).

42. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1953), ch. 3, "Persons."

posed. Hegel, in return, is arguing that there can be no such self-consciousness without the existence of others already presupposed. You might say that these are opposite sides of the same coin; perhaps, but Hegel's side was a side that had never been adequately argued before.

The argument that self-consciousness presupposes recognition of and by other people is in fact two arguments. The first is an argument to the effect that one cannot have self-consciousness *at all* (in the sense that a dog or cat lacks self-consciousness, for example) without the "mediation" of other people. Then there is the argument that one cannot have a *particular* self-consciousness—that is, self-consciousness of oneself as a particular person, without other people. The first sense of self-consciousness is the indeterminate Fichtean sense of the *Wissenschaftslehre*; it is dealt with in the last few pages of the section on "self-certainty" (175–77). The second sense of self-consciousness is also Fichtean, but it is an *ethical* sense of self, a sense of one's *rights* and *status*; it is the heart of the Master-slave conflict, through which it is determined.

The general sense of self-consciousness is not, *contra* Descartes and Fichte, an immediate "intuition." It emerges from struggle with the world, but not, as in Fichte, with the "non-self." There is a sense, perhaps, in which my dog becomes "self-conscious" when he is threatened by a larger dog or dragged to the veterinarian, but this is something less than the "absolute" and "unconditioned" metaphysical insight announced by the philosophers. Indeed, the more one thinks about this general sense of self-recognition, the more mysterious it becomes, either an unwarranted hypostatization of some odd entity from the mere facts of syntax and self-reference (the trend in modern "analytic" interpretations of the *Cogito*)⁴³ or else, in Nietzsche's phrase, "it becomes remarkable only when we begin to realize how dispensable it is":⁴⁴

... we could in fact think, feel, will and recollect, we could likewise "act" in every sense of the term, and nevertheless nothing of it all need necessarily "come into consciousness" (as one says metaphorically). The whole of life would be possible without its seeing itself as it were in a mirror; as in fact the greater part of our life still goes on without this mirroring—and even our thinking, feeling, volitional

43. E.g., Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito Ergo Sum: Inference or Performative," *Philosophical Review* 1964.

44. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 197) "The Genius of the Species".

life, as well, however painful this statement may sound to an older philosopher.

What then is the purpose of consciousness generally, when it is so *superfluous*?⁴⁵

Now it may be that Hegel pays too little attention to the role of language in primal self-consciousness (but, as we have elsewhere pointed out, the appreciation for the deep significance of language is a more modern development, in only the crudest form in Rousseau and Herder and Hegel). And it may be that Hegel, for whom *Spirit* is the ultimate goal of philosophy, would not have been willing even to consider Nietzsche's easy dismissal of the whole of consciousness (in fact, self-consciousness) as a community convenience (which Nietzsche ultimately attributes to "the interest of the herd," and "the most fatal stupidity by which we shall one day be ruined.")⁴⁶ But at least Hegel sees what Fichte does not—that there is something extremely peculiar about the "immediate intuition of self" that had been the cornerstone of philosophy since Descartes. Although he is painfully brief on the connection between self-consciousness and the recognition of other people, he at least is clear that this is the connection that is essential.

The concept of self-consciousness, Hegel tells us, is "completed in three moments":

- (a) the pure undifferentiated "I," [which is "immediate"].
- (b) The satisfaction of Desire [or "mediation"].
- (c) a double reflection, the duplication of self-consciousness. (176)

The third is said to be the "truth" of the first two, which one can read as the claim that, in fact, it is their necessary condition. The *Cogito* is an outcome, not a premise, and what Hegel is trying to do is to fill in the missing steps (refusing to put Descartes before the source, so to speak). This general consciousness, which is ultimately *Spirit*, presupposes for its recognition the sense of ourselves as individuals—"this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousness which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence" (177). In other words, the general sense of self-consciousness depends upon a prior sense of individual self-consciousness, which in turn depends upon our interaction with other people.

In what has come before we have repeatedly emphasized that every form in the *Phenomenology* implies, in some sense, an ontology, a claim

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

about what is *real*. In the first three chapters, what are real are objects, though what *makes* them real is a matter of some dispute. But now, we enter a world which is, Hegel would argue, much more accurate as a representation of our own. The world (as Sartre said of Hell) is *other people*. Philosophers have long taken it as too obvious that reality ultimately consists of material entities, some of which take on the peculiar form of human beings. (Strawson argues this, for example, in *Individuals*.) But if we accurately characterize our world, our sense of reality, without the prejudices of science and the philosophers, it is clear that what has most meaning, what occupies by far the lion's share of our time and energy, are other people and our interactions with them. We deal with things mainly indirectly, by reference to others. A car is not, first of all, a material object; it is a status symbol, a piece of private property which I (and not others) may drive; it is a convenient way to visit friends and relatives, get to work, and so on. Reality is *interpersonal* reality, not Thales' water or Pythagoras' numbers or Plato's Forms or atoms, electrons or electromagnetic fields. It was Socrates' conversations, not what they were about, that constituted his reality. With this reading of Hegel, our view of reality turns around once and for all, away from mere knowledge and back to ourselves—collectively. Nature is, like other people, a mirror of ourselves, the stage of our interpersonal world.

We are not yet to the heart of the argument—and we have not begun to enter into the Master-Slave parable. Master and Slave is one (particularly dramatic) illustration of the formation of individual self-consciousness, but it is not the only one, and, more generally, we have to first understand the sense in which mutual recognition and the demand for recognition is the precondition of self-consciousness.

Hegel never tells us—nor am I sure what he would say—how it is that the demand for recognition emerges in the first place. Rousseau had a theory according to which we were all “by nature” *indifferent* to one another, though also compassionate when need be.⁴⁷ But it is not clear in Rousseau either, why we should have ever dropped that attitude of indifference and compassion, except that he is very clear that it is modern society (not society in general) which has “corrupted” us. Hobbes suggested that our “original” position vis-à-vis one another was selfishness and the threat of homicide, but he too seemed to pre-

47. Rousseau's argument is in his second *Discourse On the Origins of Inequality*, (New York: Dutton, 1976), though this is not the only characterization to be found there. For a good discussion, see Arthur Lovejoy, “The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*,” in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 14–37.

sume that self-consciousness itself was not in need of explanation. So too Fichte, in his ethical works,⁴⁸ takes individual self-consciousness as more or less an already established matter (the self-differentiation of the ego) and not in need of account. In this tradition, Hegel may be forgiven for not postulating a mechanism for the concept of self in its formation; at least he is clear, as others are not, that the general context for formation of self is *conflict* and *opposition*.

The phenomenological argument for the acquisition of a particular consciousness of self, and thus a particular self, is central to Jean-Paul Sartre's life-long philosophical project, though he too seems too easily to suppose that there is some primitive self-consciousness (which he obscurely calls "prereflective cogito") that precedes definition. In his later work, *St Genet: Actor and Martyr*, Sartre has young Genet accused of being a thief by his elders, and thus accused, that is what he becomes; that is what he *makes* himself.⁴⁹ There is no "indifference" between us, for Hegel; we *create* each other. A person is neither ugly nor beautiful; it is the opinions of others that make him or her so. A person is not intelligent or stupid, except by comparison with and in the eyes of others. A person is not courageous, or generous, or shy, or tall, or fat, except in the context of other people, and what they say to us. (How long can I think myself brilliant when my friends all call me "dumb?") "The dizzying word" uttered to young Jean Genet was "thief"; for some of us it is "fat" or "stupid" or "clumsy" or "inferior" or "sick," and that is indeed what we become. Or as Sartre puts it elsewhere, "I am . . . as I *appear* to the Other."⁵⁰

Of course, this is only half of the story; the other half is that I am, in Sartre's Hegelian terms, "for myself," though this is something I also acquire, not simply a "given" in consciousness. At some point, in certain societies, I can also learn to reject the ascriptions of others, rebel against them, and therein lies the existential tension in which human relations develop. A young woman thinks of herself as "mature"; her mother treats her as a child. The bureaucrat treats the young man as a faceless number on a list; the young man resents this and makes an obscene gesture to crudely assert his identity. How this concept of individuality develops is, again, a question that Hegel treats only briefly, later, in the chapter on "Reason." But it is important to note that, even in these two homely examples, the assertion of self is

48. *Das System der Sittenlehre* (1798), trans. A.E. Kroeger as *System of Ethics* (London: Trübner, 1897); and *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796), trans. A.E. Kroeger as *The Science of Ethics* (London: Trübner, 1889).

49. Sartre, *St. Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. B. Frechtman (New York: Braziller, 1963).

50. *Being and Nothingness*, Part III, ch. 3.

a *reaction*, not an “immediate intuition.” It is a reaction against a concept of self imposed by others which, for reasons yet to be understood, one finds unacceptable. Moreover, it might make sense to say at this point that the self is mainly a *theory*—or a set of competing theories, which are borne out or refuted, confirmed or discouraged, only in practice. And “practice” means—not obedience to the moral law, which is the paradigm for Kant and Fichte—but contact and confrontation with other people.

What is the argument? Unfortunately, Hegel does not give us one. But then, there is precious little argument to be found elsewhere either. The question “What would a person be like if he or she were raised from infancy without the company of other people?” has been part (though the smaller part) of the “state of nature” mythology ever since Hobbes and Rousseau, at least (though one could certainly trace it back to the Medievals, and perhaps to the early Greeks).⁵¹ The current assumption seems to be that a person so deprived of companionship would hardly be “human” and self-conscious, if at all, in the sense that a wild dog is self-conscious, aware of its body and its needs (which is not even to say aware *that* it has certain needs.) It is not clear how uncompromisingly Hegel would have accepted this modern assumption, but it is clear that, standing on Fichte’s shoulders, he came much closer to it than almost any philosopher before him—and many after him. With Marx, he was one of the first and most powerful proponents of a view that still has too little respectability in philosophy: that “truth” is first of all social truth, and that the self of self-consciousness is not so much a logical oddity (as in the *cogito* and its variations) as an interpersonal construction—at which point philosophy suddenly takes a turn away from metaphysics and epistemology into the foreign territory of social ontology.

Master and Slave: A Parable of the Self in Formation

The activity (of the self) in conjoining opposites, and the clash of these opposites . . . are to be united . . . That the clash, as such, is and must be conditional upon a conjoining, is easy enough to see. The opposites, as such, are completely opposed; they have nothing whatever in common; if one is posited the other cannot be: they clash only insofar as the boundary between them is posited, and this boundary is posited by the positing neither of the one nor of the other; it must be posited on its own.—But the boundary is then nothing other than what is common to both . . . They clash only if

51. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

they are conjoined. . . . Both are therefore one and the same. —Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre*

This opposition is the condition in virtue of which the Ego becomes practical: the Ego must suspend its opposite. . . . one of the opposites must become dependent on the other. . . .

For any rational being (*Vernunftwesen*) must make unto itself a sphere for its freedom; it ascribes this sphere to itself. But it is only by antithesis that it is itself this sphere; the sphere is constituted only insofar as the rational being posits itself exclusively in it, so that no other person can have any choice within it. —Hegel, *Differenz*-essay (on Fichte)

It must supersede this otherness of itself. This is the supersession [*Aufheben*] of the first ambiguity ["it has lost itself, and finds itself in another being"], and is therefore itself a second ambiguity ["in the other sees its own self."] First, it must proceed to supersede the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being; secondly, in so doing it proceeds to supersede its *own* self, for this other is itself. —*Phenomenology* (180)

The Master-Slave parable is a specific illustration of the reciprocal formation of two self-consciousnesses. There can be no master without a slave, no slave without a master (though the two can co-exist in a single person).⁵² There is no dependency without someone to be dependent upon, who thereby becomes *relatively* independent. A son may be financially dependent on his father, who is thereby presumably independent, but the father may in turn be financially dependent on his boss, and emotionally dependent upon his son, who thereby is relatively independent emotionally. It is a familiar interpersonal quandary; relationships often hold together because of their *asymmetry*. Master-slave is but an extreme; domination and submission are common in a great many interactions—on the basis of who's smarter, who's neater, who's more mechanically inclined, who's more charming, who's more angry, who's more sexually demanding, who's more insecure, and so on. (Sartre was not at all out of the Hegelian line when he transferred the Master-Slave parable to the arena of sex and romantic love; but it must not therefore be thought that Hegel's parable is identical to Sartre's brilliant if somewhat morbid use of it.) Mutual definition takes other forms as well; love redefines selfhood in a way that need have nothing to do with power and asymmetrical dependency-independency, but can still be asymmetrical (for example, one person is sensual, the other more abstract; one can be

52. *Differenz*-essay, p. 149, on Fichte's "Natural Law" essay; and in "Unhappy Consciousness," in the *PG*, 206ff.

“soft,” the other “hard”). Hatred can define mutual selfhood; so too can membership on a team (where each player has a different role or position); dancing together briefly defines a certain physical selfhood, which need not have anything to do with dependency-independence. But in “the state of nature”—as well as in most middle-class relationships—dependency and independence tend to be primary self-defining categories. In that imaginary situation before the advent of society—even before the unity of families and tribes—dependency and independence had to turn on a single factor (since financial and emotional dependency as such had not become possible), and that factor is—life and death itself.

The Master-Slave parable is a life-and-death struggle. In more modern circumstances, death might be more symbolic, for instance, not inviting an antagonist to your next dinner party; but in the state of nature, there is nothing else to fight for, nothing else at stake, no property, no status, no possibilities for promotion. There is only that vaguely defined “sphere of freedom” that Fichte and Hegel (in the *Differenz*-essay, not in the *Phenomenology*) talk about. Indeed, one might argue that the life-or-death clash is always implicit in every confrontation—and often surfaces in at least ritualized form in philosophy debates (“demolished his argument,” “murder him in debate,” “criticisms right on target”) and, of course, in sports and politics.⁵³ Almost always—except in some absurdist theater—no one dies, except, perhaps, in mortification (the etymology of the word is significant) or ostracism. But in the Master-Slave parable too, no one dies. (If one did, the parable would simply be over.) The fight to the death is a device; it is also, of course, the key ingredient in the Hobbesian—and Fichtean—“state of nature” mythologies. It is the extreme, the “absolute negation.” It is the limit of life. But is it, therefore, the limit of self? Hegel says “no.” The limit of self is rather the notion of *dependency*.

Hegel is not at all clear about the relationship of general self-consciousness to specific self-consciousness. It sometimes seems as if the general self-consciousness is already formed at the outset of the master-slave confrontation, which is concerned with the determination of the specific sense of self. But a good case could also be made for the argument that Hegel first establishes specific self-consciousness through the original meeting and then introduces the formation of the general sense of self-consciousness through the life-and-death struggle. In any case, that specific self, if not also the more general sense of

53. See, e.g., “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,” by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 76, no. 8 (Aug. 1980), esp. p. 454 f.

self as sheer self-conscious existence, is defined in the “state of nature”—before the origins of social bonds—by *independence*, by self-consciousness itself, that pre-reflective Fichtean sense that one is everything, that the world is one’s own.

This sense of omnipotence is destroyed by the intrusion of another person. Consider yourself alone in the mountains, feeling so “at one” with the miraculous landscape laid out before you, as if it were for your eyes alone. Suddenly, another climber appears, and the whole phenomenology changes, from your experience of “oneness” to an interpersonal confrontation—even if it is limited to such banalities as “Hi, how are you?” That sense of presence is lost, and we can well understand Sartre’s somewhat grotesque image of “my world going down the sinkhole of the other’s consciousness.”⁵⁴ Of course, this brief scenario does not yet in any way make me *dependent* upon the other person, but I have already lost that sense of *independence*, that sense of myself as everything, and it is this loss with which the Master-Slave parable begins. As Fichte said, “I must be something for myself and by myself alone”; other people are *always*—as “other”—a limitation on my self.

The Master-Slave parable itself falls into two parts: the first is the battle for mutual recognition, in which each person tries to regain—through the other—the lost sense of independence (178–89). This part of the parable culminates in the “life and death struggle” and the victory of one over the other, tentatively establishing the winner as independent master, the loser as dependent slave. The second part of the parable (190–96) is the turn-about in which the master becomes dependent on the slave and the slave independent of the master.

Independence and dependence can be defined in a slightly different way (one which plays a primary role in Sartre’s use of the parable): independence is being “self-existent,” and *subject*; dependence is being defined by criteria not one’s own, as an *object*. To appreciate the power of this tension between seeing oneself as one wishes and being forced (whether by circumstances or other people or—usually—both), it is important to remember the force of the Kantian dualism between self as subject and as “freedom” and self as “an object of nature.” In his own practical philosophy, Kant insisted,

54. That metaphor is from *Being and Nothingness*, Part III, but cf. Estelle’s unhappy comment in *No Exit*:

INEZ Suppose I be your looking-glass? . . .

AM I not better than your mirror?

ESTELLE I don’t quite know. You scare me. My reflection in mirrors never did that. I was used to it, like something I had tamed. I knew it so well. I’m going to smile and my smile will sink down into your pupils, and heaven knows what will become of it.

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.⁵⁵

Fichte, following Kant, saw treating someone else as an object—or worse still, treating yourself as an object of nature—as horrendous, an act of immorality in the first instance, extreme cowardice in the second.⁵⁶ Schelling and Hegel shared this horror of treating humanity as object and means rather than as free subjects and as ends, and for them, the distinction was of enormous importance, even if (as in Hegel) it can eventually be resolved. Thus understood, the Master-Slave parable involves each person's insistence that he or she be recognized by the other as a free and independent being, which, paradoxically, results in the limitation and *dependency* of each on the other. But this insistence, and the consequent paradox, is essential to Fichte's *System of Ethics* (*Sittenlehre*) and his theory of *Natural Rights* as well. Indeed, he saw an irresolvable tension between individual "self-identity" and the agreement to respect each other as such, and this tension was reflected in an equally irresolvable conflict between morality (which presupposed an absolutely free and independent self) and the state, which, through threat of punishment, treated the self as an object of nature. It is this that Hegel thoroughly rejects in Fichte, the same contradiction that he (somewhat confusingly) introduced in the "inverted world" in the chapter on "Force and the Understanding" (158–59). It is also the reason why, in the whole of the *Phenomenology*, he rejects the notion that the individual self is in any way "independent" or, for that matter, free and self-sufficient. The first step in this long argument is to reject the classical "state of nature" mythology—the mythology of already independent beings who sacrifice their independence in confrontation and then are forced to increasingly desperate (conceptual) efforts to regain the independence they believe themselves to have lost.

The key to the Master-Slave parable is the mutual recognition that self (or specific self-consciousness) is dependent on others in a complex reciprocal interaction, in what R.D. Laing appropriately calls "knots": "I see you, you see me, I see you seeing me, I see you seeing me see you see me. . . ." Hegel says just this in his first paragraphs, in his usual less than attractive manner:

181. This ambiguous supersession of its ambiguous otherness is equally an ambiguous return *into itself*. For first, through the super-

55. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 66.

56. Wiss. Introduction and Part III.

session, it receives back its own self, because, by superseding *its* otherness, it again becomes equal to itself; but secondly, the other self-consciousness equally gives it back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but supersedes this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other again go free.

182. Now, this movement of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness has in this way been represented as the action of *one* self-consciousness, but this action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well. For the other is equally independent and self-contained, and there is nothing in it of which it is not itself the origin. The first does not have the object before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it. Thus the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.

183. Thus the action has a double significance not only because it is directed against itself as well as against the other, but also because it is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other.

Hegel's play on "double significance" here might be taken in an exponential fashion, in that each moment of awareness is reflected back and reflected again, and, as in two mirrors facing one another, the number of reflections multiplies rapidly.

Consider a pair of lovers—or a husband and wife, or two very close friends. Each sees his or her identity as defined by the other (at least to a significant degree). Each wants the other's approval. We would like to think, of course, that there is no problem or tension here; as in the more general "social contract," each simply agrees to give approval freely in return for receiving it as well. But life is not so simple, and it is the Fichtean paradox that shows us why this is so. Each person would like to be *certain* of the approval of the other, but to be certain of the other is already to lose that sense of the other as an independent judge. I want you to say "I love you," but the last thing I would want to do is to ask you, much less force you, to say it. I want you to say it freely, and not because I want you to or expect you to. But then, you know that I do want you to say it, and I know that you know that I want you to say it. So you say it; I don't really believe you. Did you say it because you mean it? Or in order not to hurt my feelings? And so I get testy, more demanding, to which your response is, quite reasonably, to become angry or defensive, until finally I provoke

precisely what I feared all along,—an outburst of abuse. But then, I feel righteously hurt; you get apologetic. You seek forgiveness; I hesitate. You aren't sure whether I will say it or not: I'm not sure whether you mean it or not, but I say, "I forgive you." You wonder whether I'm really forgiving you or just trying to keep from hurting your feelings, and so you become anxious, testy, and so on and so on. It happens a million times a day, in varying degrees of pathology and emotional violence. It is not the enlightened reciprocity imagined by many philosophers.

So it is that our selves get defined, from the earliest confrontations with our parents and siblings to our cocktail party gamesmanship and professional "ethics." By no means must this process by either antagonistic or unpleasant, for everything we have just discussed might just as well take place through love and constant approval—which Freud and Sartre rightly saw as just as manipulative as threats and disapproval. If one believes that the self is initially independent and wholly self-defining, then *any* such mutual process will appear to be confrontational and manipulative. But then again, this is by no means the only way to view the self, however much philosophical tradition there is to support it.

The self of Rousseau in the "state of nature" is healthy, happy, and independent; society involves the limitation of this independence, but in return for the possibility of virtue. Fichte, needless to say, is more than inspired by this vision, even if he takes the entrance into society as based as much on antagonism and conflict as on Rousseau's more optimistic vision of a "general will." Thus, Hegel says of Fichte, "Freedom must be *surrendered* in order to make possible the freedom of all rational beings living in community."⁵⁷ But such freedom he says, must be "merely negative" and it is this sense of "freedom from" others that Hegel proposes to reject, here and in the section to follow. Indeed, it is not the "liberation" of the slave that Hegel intends to show us—as if one thereby regains an independence lost; it is to the contrary the recognition that there is no "freedom" nor independence in the "state of nature"; indeed the idea of the "state of nature" is not only a historical fiction (to which all parties would readily agree), but it is a *fraudulent* fiction, which does not even make conceptual sense, much less is it based on historical or anthropological fact.

In the parable itself, each person finds himself "in the other"; that is, a person is defined not by his opinions of himself alone but by the opinions of others, and the reflection of one's own opinions by

57. *Differenz*-essay, p. 144.

them, and so on. Why then, the “fight to the death”? Hegel says, “the need to negate the other’s otherness.” But Hegel’s notion of negation does not necessarily mean death, as we have already pointed out. Making the other “one’s own” is also a way of “negating” the other. A warlord need not kill his enemies; he can make them his slaves. A powerful boss need not run the business by himself; he can surround himself with “yes-men.” Not only that, insofar as one’s identity arises and is defined only with other people, killing the others is self-defeating, for one loses precisely that source of recognition that one has come to require. Killing the other not only fails to remove this acquired need; it also deprives one of the power to possibly change the other’s views in the future. Thus the pre-execution curse has always had such a momentous effect in history and literature, regardless of the importance of the victim. What is essential is that it cannot be undone.

Hegel also says, and this part of the parable is not always appreciated, that only by staking one’s own life does one really become self-conscious. This risk of life entails in turn the attempt to kill the other (187). Of course, one can risk one’s life *and* win the approval of others without trying to kill anyone (for instance, in some death-defying feat of courage), and it is not at all clear, again, that “risking one’s life” has to be taken literally. But the point is clear enough, and it is here, that the *general* sense of self-consciousness can be argued to arise. The point is proto-Heideggerian, one might say, though it is also in Fichte and, before him, indisputably in Socrates and the Bible: “only by risking your life can you regain it.” Whatever the specific definition of self, it is only confrontation with death itself (so the argument goes) that forces us or allows us to appreciate the meaning of life as such. Thus it is that the general sense of self-consciousness arises, and thus it is that the need for a “life-and-death” struggle emerges, *not* from the need to “negate” the other so much as from the alleged and very romantic need to risk one’s own life.

Hegel does not always keep these two motives in order, but, in any case, the outcome is clear. By limiting his “state of nature” parable to the traditional confrontation of two, isolated individuals, Hegel eliminates all extraneous considerations (social status and etiquette, for example) and allows his characters to indeed fight to the death. But they don’t;

This trial by death . . . does away with the truth which was supposed to issue from it, and so too with the certainty of self generally. . . . death is the natural negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition. (188)

Here too the primary proof—to risk one's own life—comes to the fore. If one does die, that shows that he certainly did risk his life; but, if he doesn't, the struggle is not yet a proof. One needs the other to keep alive the recognition of the struggle, and so, death is not the goal of the struggle after all, but rather, the goal is the struggle itself, the "clash" of Fichte's works; this is the "truth" of self-certainty. A lively debate has gone on in the literature—whether the slave does not die because he would rather be a slave than dead,⁵⁸ or whether he lives because the master "prefers a servant to a corpse."⁵⁹ The text supports neither view in any detail, but provides some evidence for both. The question is not the dynamics of mercy and survival but the essential nature of selfhood and its relationship to other people and the prospect of one's own death. These two points, whatever the details, are sufficiently clear: (1) there is no selfhood without the continued recognition of others (though the continuation may carry on in one's own consciousness); and (2) selfhood may sometime seem more important than life, since one is willing to risk one's life for the sake of self-consciousness. In other words, *contra* Hobbes and Fichte (if not Rousseau) the threat to one's life is not the limit of one's independence, since, at least in a "negative" sense, one can prove one's independence of the other by risking one's life.

Life isn't everything: for self-consciousness, selfhood is.

The second part of the parable contains the twist which has transfigured much of recent history as well as philosophy; it is the *inversion* of master and slave; the master becomes dependent on the slave; the slave becomes independent of the master. Marx, of course, transformed the inversion parable into a prognosis about the whole of civilized history and the eventual but "inevitable" victory of the servant classes. Hegel, however, is concerned at this point with still isolated individuals, who need be in no sense "civilized" and, in any case, are not yet concerned with the "surplus value" of their efforts and their ability to invest it for further gain. The imagery here is rather that of a feudal lord, growing fat and lazy on the sweat of his servant (probably servants, but let's leave it at one). Hegel's liberal attitudes toward serfdom and feudal divisions of power were uncompromising, but so too were the attitudes of virtually all of his friends and colleagues at the time, most of whom were far more radical in their liberalism than he. He looked at the lord and master with undisguised repulsion, but he saw the slave with something less than sympathy too. Indeed, if we want a good concrete portrait of the master

58. Kaufmann, p. 153; Royce, p. 177.

59. Soll, p. 20.

and the slave in Hegel's parable we might well go back to his early essay on "the positivity of Christianity" of 1795, in which his characterization of the "slave mentality" of the early Christians is almost matched in sarcasm by his comments about the decadence of later Rome, and both in contrast with his shining commentary on the ancient Greeks. ("The Greeks and Romans, who by this time [3rd to 5th centuries, A.D.] were overcivilized, servile, and plunged in a cesspool of vice."⁶⁰)

Perhaps the modern word which best fits the master is "jaded," since the fruits of life come to him effortlessly, with instant satisfaction, which leads him therefore to a continuous search for new satisfactions, and ever more extravagant desires. It is at this point that Hegel's too brief *Faustian* discussion of desire earlier in chapter 4 becomes essential to the argument; it is this: Satisfaction ultimately doesn't satisfy. Desire seeks not to be satisfied but to be prolonged. This too, is pure Fichte, for in the final sections of his *Wissenschaftslehre* he goes on at great length about the importance of "longing," and in this, we may suppose, Hegel, also a romantic of sorts (despite his criticisms of Romanticism), would well agree. What is wrong with the feudal master and his late Greek and Roman counterparts is that they have ceased the struggle, lost the virtues and restraints that made the ancient Greeks so admirable, and sunk themselves in "a cesspool of vice." They have lost the ability to satisfy themselves, ironically, because they are so easily satisfied. What is more, they have increasingly lost their sense of just that which makes them "masters," namely, their independence; they have become materially dependent upon the slaves, and Hegel is enough of a materialist (*contra* Feuerbach's and Marx's opinion of him) to believe that, where there is material dependency, phenomenological dependency cannot be far behind.

What also emerges in this parable, as the other side of Hegel's disgust with the jaded desires and instant satisfactions of the master, is the glorification of *work* as the answer to this—the old Protestant ethic about "busy hands" and virtue. In fact, as Marx rudely but correctly pointed out, "the only labor Hegel knew was the abstract labors of the mind."⁶¹ But what he extols here in the *Phenomenology* is clearly physical work, the shaping and creating of *things*. Part of the thesis is pure Schelling, that art (creativity) is "the synthesis of the subjective and the objective," the imposition of one's desires and conscious intentions

60. Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," trans. T.M. Knox in *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 168. Cf. also Hegel's rather inhuman comments about the peasant class in his Jena lectures (see Chapter 9, sect. 2 d).

61. Alfred Sohm-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor*. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978).

onto material nature, thus re-forming it as our own, and no longer as mere "nature." The imposition of ourselves on nature—or "the clash between freedom and nature"—plays a major role in Fichte's *Wissenschaftlehre* and even more so in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. But the work ethic is by no means original with them, and one has to trace it (at least) through the already established secular ethics of Luther and Calvin. But the point for the parable is simply that work—the imposition of free consciousness on physical nature—is the mark of freedom and self-realization. (It is not unimportant that Hegel had been reading Adam Smith's labor-theory of value—"only labor has intrinsic value"—only a few years before.)

It is because the master doesn't work that he becomes jaded. Satisfaction through work is continuous, culminating in the enjoyment of its fruits but by no means limited to this. By not working, the master, who imposes his will on "the thing" only by using it and, where appropriate, eating it, becomes estranged or "alienated" from things by not working on them. He has no sense of the process of food production; he only eats. He has no sense of crafts; he only takes and uses. And it is such sense of production, Hegel insists, that goes into true satisfaction. The slave, on the other hand, does get this sense, of turning an "independent" material thing (the language here is intentionally confusing) into a "dependent" thing to be enjoyed by the master (190). But the slave has his problems too, for even while getting the satisfaction of work, he does not get to enjoy the fruits of his labors. He may take pride in the wheat he has grown and sown, the bread he has made, but he will not enjoy its "dependent aspect" by eating it. This is what Marx later calls "alienated labor,"⁶² and it is, in part, what makes the slave a slave.

But it is a mistake to take these material inequities themselves as the problem of "independence and dependence," for what Hegel is concerned with is the nature of selfhood. This is not to say that one's material productions and enjoyments have nothing to do with selfhood, but they are secondary to what Hegel calls "recognition," and they are significant only insofar as they signify patterns of mutual recognition. (If I buy bread from my baker, I do not thereby turn him into a slave, even if he grew the wheat and baked the bread himself; and it does not matter whether I pay him or not—that is, so far as the master-slave question is concerned. What matters is the regard we have for each other, whether he feels that growing, baking, and

62. The first of four forms of alienation: "Alienation from the Product of One's Activity," in "Alienated Labor," in *Early Writings*, ed. L. Coletti (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 429.

giving me the bread is *his* decision, rather than mine.) The master-slave parable turns on a shift in the status of their mutual recognition; it is the master who must come to *see himself* as dependent, and the slave who must come to see himself, in some sense, as independent of the master. But this sense is not primarily his work. Indeed, the problem is that the slave never gets to really see himself as independent; he is only relatively independent of his master, in that his master is now dependent on him. But what he does come to see is that, while he has mastery over some things, he still is not independent, regardless of his revised relationship with the master. And it is this that drives *both* the slave and the master to ever-more desperate efforts to regain what they see as their former independence, "the whole of objective being" (196).⁶³

Hegel gives us three factors in the slave's gradual recognition of his independence from the master—his *fear*, his *service*, and his *work*. By virtue of his fear, the possibility of his own death gives him a sense of general self-consciousness (this century proudly preserved as "authenticity") which allows him to realize, at any moment, that freedom from the master (if only "negative freedom") is his. He need only kill himself, or allow himself to be killed. He does not do this, of course, but the fact that he knows that he can, the fact that he knows that he will die eventually anyway puts a distance between himself and his master, establishes at least the flicker of life itself as somehow his own, and not entirely within the control of the master or "the fear of Death, the absolute Lord" (194). Similarly, the slave becomes aware that, in service to the master, he is establishing his own identity, and, indeed, is redefining the master in terms of his relationship to him. The servant becomes as important to the master as the master is to him and thus (in the jargon of "for itself") he no longer exists simply for the master, but for himself, and the master, in turn, exists *in him* (191–93). Finally, there is the work relationship itself, between the slave and "the thing", which is not enjoyed by the master; thus the slave comes to recognize his mastery over at least some things, and so, as a master in this restricted sense, sees himself as no longer wholly dependent.

One could go on at length and extrapolate from this simple parable some profound truths about work, human relationships, and who knows what else; but it is my intention here only to try to capture

63. If there is unanimity among the commentators on one thing, it is that the slave emerges independent of the master, who drops out of the picture, while the slave moves on in the dialectic. John Plamenatz, e.g., says, "the future lies with the slave." *Man and Society*, (New York: 1963), vol. 2, p. 155. This is simply wrong, and fails to take account of one of the most important features of the text—that the slave is not free, and that the master ends up in as wretched shape as his servant.

what Hegel himself is immediately trying to do, and he has done it: the master, who thought that he could regain his mythological independence by subjecting the slave to his will and forcing him, under penalty of death, to recognize him (the master) *as master*, now finds himself in the awkward position of being just as dependent upon his position in life and those who surround him as his slave, whom he once considered merely as "his thing." The slave, on the other hand, realizes that he is not necessarily a slave, after all, but has some measure of independence too. It is at this point that it becomes clear—as Hegel argued explicitly and frequently in his early manuscripts—that independence and dependency are not necessarily to be found only in confrontation with the other. Once self-consciousness has found itself, it then internalizes these categories within itself, so that even the master sees himself somewhat as a slave, and even the lowest and most fearful slave comes to recognize in himself some degree of mastery, or what Fichte called "an impulse to absolute independent self-activity."⁶⁴ Both are thereby "unhappy" with what they find in themselves, and both are compelled to rationalize their unhappiness, and find for themselves a solace of imagined independence which in fact they never knew, in the various philosophical escape fantasies of Stoicism, Skepticism, and primitive Christianity—the same unworldly, miserable, oppressive, servile cult of consciousness that Hegel so rudely criticized in his early manuscripts—which he now calls, "unhappy consciousness."

Stoicism, Skepticism, and Unhappy Consciousness: Freedom Through Fantasy

For the independent self-consciousness, it is only the pure abstraction of the 'I' that is its essential nature, and, when it does develop its own differences, this differentiation does not become a nature that is objective and intrinsic to it.

We are in the presence of self-consciousness in a new shape, a consciousness which, as the infinitude of consciousness or as its own pure movement, is aware of itself as essential being, a being which *thinks* or is a free self-consciousness.

In thinking, I am free. —*Phenomenology* (197)

Freedom is just another word, for nothing left to lose. —Kris Kristopherson

64. *Vocation of Man*, p. 95.

The progression called "Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Unhappy Consciousness" is the ever more desperate series of attempts to regain a mythical independence. The master-slave parable marked the loss of that sense of unlimited, isolated existence, as if, that is, one could imagine without absurdity the possibility of anything we would call human with an "independent" existence in the first place. The master-slave is therefore not the first step in the formation of social consciousness, but a pre-social myth which has been abused by philosophers to draw conclusions about the nature of society which are absurd.⁶⁵ The section on "Freedom" is the continuation of that myth, and the concept of "freedom," accordingly, is conceived of in a strictly negative fashion, and as it expands it is increasingly empty. The criterion of freedom, in fact, is total independence from the limitations of other people—Rousseau's criterion in his second *Discourse*. And if there is nothing one can do to achieve that independence within a relationship—whether as master or as slave—then it will have to be found somewhere else, outside of all human relationships, perhaps, in a sense, even outside of the whole sensuous world of consciousness that has concerned us so far.

The three philosophies herein discussed have one trait in common above all else; they are reactions *against* the frustrations of the world. They are primarily denials and thus "negative." A popular song today says, "freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose"; it is not a bad summary of "freedom" in this part of the *Phenomenology*. It is *not* a reaction against slavery as such, but a rejection of any sense of limitation to self-consciousness, even if that means skimming off self-consciousness from the world through which it emerged in the first place. No error is more common than viewing Stoicism *et al.* as a reaction against the oppressions of slavery, and the idea that it is the slave, but not the master, who is followed from here on.⁶⁶ But this would be totally at odds with Hegel's all-inclusive ambitions. (After all, masters are part of Spirit too.) And it totally ignores the fact that, at the end of the master-slave parable, the problem of the master is the same as the problem of the slave—namely, loss of that same sense of independence that he once thought he had guaranteed, as a master. But if we need any further argument on this point, the conclusive consideration should be this—that two of the most readily identifiable

65. *Differenz*-essay, p. 144ff.

66. Thus John Plamenatz says: "... the future lies with the slave. It is his destiny to create the community in which everyone accords recognition to everyone else, the community in which Spirit attains its end and achieves its satisfaction" (*Man and Society*, vol. 2). Cf. George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage'" in MacIntyre, *Hegel*, p. 193,— "Where did Hegel ever say this?" Indeed, he never did.

voices in the "Freedom" section are Marcus Aurelius, Stoic philosopher and the emperor of all Rome, and Epictetus, a slave. The problems of self-consciousness are not only the domain of the socially oppressed.

It is unnecessary to repeat Hegel's early enthusiasm for the Greeks and his thorough knowledge of ancient philosophy. Perhaps it is worth repeating the fact that Skepticism (with a "k") as it appears here refers only to the ancient philosophy of life taught by Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, who were influenced by Oriental religions rather than David Hume and the eighteenth-century "sceptics." But the period of Greek philosophy here discussed, unlike the brighter days of Athens reported by Plato and Aristotle and their contemporary playwrights, has a gloomy, anti-worldly cast, with which Hegel obviously has little sympathy. Indeed, he sees them not as alternatives and as opposites of Northern Christian gloom, as Goethe wrote in *Faust*, but as its logical precedents. Indeed, the path from Stoicism to the early Christian church is easily marked, so long as we make some distinction between the philosophy of the church (which is what "unhappy consciousness" is about) and the reality of Jesus himself—which will have to wait a later and much more favorable place in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*.⁶⁷ Stoicism, Skepticism, and "Unhappy Consciousness" mark a conceptual path of progressive renunciation of the world, and Hegel, accordingly, despises them all.

STOICISM

Freedom is independence from others, and if this is so, then the one truly free activity is *thinking*

because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being- for-myself. (197)

This notion of freedom as thinking, Hegel identifies in "the history of Spirit" as *Stoicism*;

Its principle is that consciousness is a being that thinks, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such. (198)

Stoicism is a rejection of the master-slave relationship (199) for it realizes that, whether as master or as servant, there is no escape from

67. I will argue, the section on "the Beautiful Soul," in the last part of Chapter 6, "Spirit."

dependency. Or, in other words, given the strict definition of freedom as conceptual independence, only God can be free, as “thought thinking itself,” in the classic phrase from Aristotle.⁶⁸ And yet, our aim is to be free in precisely this sense (which led Sartre, in a sometimes stoical *Being and Nothingness*, to say that we “desire to be God”).⁶⁹ And to do this is to withdraw from the world and its master-slave dependencies and to become “indifferent” (*apatheia* was the word of the ancients).⁷⁰ And this is no less true of the most powerful earthly lord, the emperor of all Rome (Marcus Aurelius) or the lowest of slaves (Epictetus);

whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentiality of thought. (199)

And lest anyone still think that it is only the slave that becomes a Stoic, Hegel tells us, in no uncertain terms, that,

As a *universal* form of the World-Spirit, Stoicism could only appear on the scene in a time of *universal* fear and bondage, but also a time of universal culture which had raised itself to the level of thought. (199; emphasis added)

Hegel spends only a little over two pages of opaque prose discussing Stoicism, but its references are absolutely clear if one compares his phrases with the original sources. The question of the “criterion of truth” (*Phenomenology*, 200), for example, is drawn directly from Sextus Empiricus, who defines it as: “the thing in view of which we assert that these things exist and those do not exist, and that these are the case and those are not.”⁷¹ The answer to the question of the criterion, in turn, is the now familiar word *recognition*, or what we would probably call “by intuition.” The too-simple phrase “the True and the Good shall consist in reasonableness” (*ibid.*) summarizes the whole of Stoic thought in a single sentence, and the cumbersome phrase “achieve its consumation as absolute negation” (201) refers to the ultimate assertion of freedom—namely, suicide, which is, of course, exactly what Seneca did, after thinking and writing about it for years. (There are

68. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072.

69. The argument is that we want to be absolutely free (as “for-itself” or consciousness) but at the same time completely formed (as “in-itself”); but this is the classical definition of God, as “in and for Himself” both completely free and completely formed with “all possible perfections.”

70. See J.M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 26, 31, 34, 35, 38, 45, 195, 196.

71. *Against the Mathematicians*, 7.29, quoted in Rist, p. 133.

few better examples of the fact that Hegel's so-called "speculative language" is more often than not euphemisms and intentional avoidance of simply saying what he means.)

In terms of history, it is evident from these passages that Hegel is in fact not talking about the whole of Stoicism, from Zeno of Citium and Chrysippus (in the third century B.C.) to Panaetius and Posidonius in the century before Christ, but only the last years of the school, and Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. Much of his information seems to come from the reportage of Sextus Empiricus, in the second century A.D.⁷² The early Stoics were not the dualists that Hegel speaks of here, separating thought and spirit from the world; that is distinctively Marcus Aurelius. The notion of "indifference" was not to be found so much in the early Stoics, who followed Aristotle in their celebration of virtuous action,⁷³ but mainly in Epictetus, who made it his dominant principle. And the notion that the ultimate assertion of freedom is suicide ("absolute negation") is distinctly Seneca, no one else.⁷⁴ Indeed, Hegel seems to have done little research into the Stoics, and even so thorough an investigation as Harris's *Hegel's Development* uncovers only an occasional reference to Stoicism.⁷⁵ But this is not surprising if the Stoics—that is, the very late Stoics in Rome—were as he insists so antithetical to the early Greek ideals he celebrated with Hölderlin. Withdrawal from the world—and suicide in particular—was not Hegel's idea of virtue and the good life.

Although what he gives us is too brief, it is not difficult to show how the (late) Stoic philosophy fits in so well with the section on "Self-consciousness." Indeed, Hegel seems to be tacitly claiming (and there

72. Of all of the ancient Stoics and Skeptics, Sextus Empiricus by far gets the most attention in Hegel's own *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Haldane and Simson, esp. vol. 1. But Sextus Empiricus was antagonistic to the Stoics, and in any case not always a dependable reporter. Curiously, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, who play key roles in the section here, are barely mentioned in the later lectures, and Chrysippus and the early Stoics, who play very little role here, are given much greater attention.

73. Chrysippus in particular defended a conception of Stoicism that placed most of its emphasis on responsibility and virtuous action. See Rist, pp. 112–32. Also Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 19f.

74. Marcus Aurelius "had his doubts" about the reasonableness of suicide, and Epictetus clearly preferred indifference to death by suicide as an assertion of one's freedom. See Rist, p. 251.

75. Harris, pp. 299, 302: "... we finally reach the opposite extreme of enlightened optimism or stoic cosmopolitanism, where the positive (authoritarian) element is reduced to a minimum assumption of 'the Author of Nature,' who is supremely Just Judge and Monarch in his own kingdom of the spirit." He quotes an early manuscript by Hegel, in which he says, "the [Stoic] citizen of the world comprehends the whole human race in his whole—and so much less of the lordship over objects and of the favor of the Ruling Being falls to the lot of any one individual; every individual loses that much more of his worth, his pretensions, and his independence; for his worth was his share in lordship." (p. 299).

is some justification for this) that the *metaphysical* notion of freedom—which is today usually discussed as “the free will problem”—originates with the Stoics, and originates in reaction to the insufferable conditions of the decadent Roman empire.⁷⁶ Freedom, on this account, is *negative* freedom, freedom *from* the determinations of the world, the sense that one aspect of us, at least, is free to do (that is, to think) what it pleases. The self thus becomes identified with thought, and thought thereby becomes freedom.⁷⁷ For the earlier Stoics, the ideal was virtue; for Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, freedom from the sufferings of the world became the ideal. Thus Seneca wrote to Lucilius, “to think about death is to think about freedom,” and Epictetus, not such a fan of self-disposal, preached the importance of apathy.⁷⁸

It should be clear how this is a distinctive conceptual advance over the master-slave way of thinking, *if*, that is, one accepts their common goal of total independence. For the master as well as the slave, there is no independence to be found in our daily life, and so, if one is to find it at all, it will only be in the unworldly realm of thought, of “spirit.” Again, the emphasis on the late Stoics is evident: it is really Marcus Aurelius who preached the division of spirit and body, and the divine nature of thought alone;

Live with the gods. But he is living with the gods who continuously exhibits his soul to them, as satisfied with its dispensation and doing what the *daimon* wishes. . . . And this *daimon* is each man's mind and reason.⁷⁹

The variations on the theme of “withdrawal” are perhaps more interesting but not as important as the central theme itself; even the early Stoics, who did not accept withdrawal from the world, believed that the world was a rational organic entity—Reason as “the soul of the World,” and they accepted a certain denigration of the physical world (or “matter”) in favor of the survival of more spiritual elements. The world would be periodically destroyed by fire, Chrysippus used to teach, but God would survive and the world would be-

76. It is generally agreed that the so-called “free will problem” was not to be found in the classic Greeks—Plato and Aristotle in particular. Aristotle simply defined “freedom” as voluntary action, which means that it is not due to “compulsion or ignorance” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110). See, for example, D.J. O'Connor, *A Critical History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 58. By the time of Augustine, however, the problem is already well defined (pp. 91–93) and it clearly has at least its origins in Chrysippus and the early Stoics (Rist, *op. cit.*).

77. This conception of “freedom” as self-identification is developed in Frithjof Bergmann, *On Being Free* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1979), ch. 1.

78. Epistles 26.10, in Rist, p. 247. On Epictetus, p. 251.

79. A.S.L. Farquharson, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Oxford, 1944), 5.27.

come "soul." The ideal life, they all believed, was life according to reason, and it is only in the late Stoics that reason turns against life, as freedom from the passions, even freedom from life itself. Thus Hegel says (too briefly) that consciousness must "grasp the living world as a system of thought" and find freedom in "pure thought" (200). Stoicism is the celebration of Reason and the rationality of the world, despite its appearances; it is the recognition that, in thought, there is nothing to fear from life. Indeed, Stoicism could be characterized (as Hegel implies) as a philosophy against fear, teaching that, with proper understanding, there is nothing to fear, not even death. Thus Seneca says, "free yourself from servitude, the fear of death and poverty; learn there is no evil in them"⁸⁰ and it would not be unwise to remind ourselves here of Fichte's own somewhat stoical stance toward reality, in his *Vocation of Man*, where he says,

... with this insight, mortal, be free, and forever released from the fear which has degraded and tormented you. You will no longer tremble at a necessity which exists only in your own thought, no longer fear to be crushed by things which are the product of your own mind.⁸¹

Stoicism is denial; it denies what it cannot control, what it cannot master, in terms of something else, only dimly recognized, the True and the Good, the flicker of cosmic Reason within us, yearning for the world as a rational whole. It would not be unfair to point out that our confidence in this view, stated more positively, is precisely what Hegel too came to believe, at least certainly in his later works. But in the *Phenomenology*, he is still too much of an intellectual activist to tolerate any form of "withdrawal from the world."

SKEPTICISM

Readers of the *Phenomenology* have often been disturbed by the somewhat ephemeral distinction they find between Stoicism, on the one hand, and Skepticism on the other. Stoicism consists of a withdrawal from the everyday world and Skepticism consists of a denial that we can know that there even is a world. The distinction is fuzzy, at best, and matters are not at all helped by the fact that Hegel's language is too similar in the two discussions. Skepticism was, historically, a direct successor to Stoicism and the attempt to solve some of the same problems. But the difference, in a few phrases, is this: Stoicism is a theory

80. Rist, p. 224.

81. *Vocation of Man*, 83.

about the world, in fact, the attempt to see the *real* world as a “system of thought.” Skepticism is, quite the contrary, the rejection of all theories about the world, since the world, if there is one, is unknowable and there is nothing intelligible to say about it. Thus, consistently, the first Skeptic Pyrrho (4th-3rd century B.C.) did not write down a word of his philosophy. Almost all of it comes to us from Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, and a few others. Hegel (in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*) rightly praises Pyrrho for his consistency in this, and beside him, the articulate and systematic scepticism of David Hume, 2500 years later, looks fraudulent by comparison.⁸²

Ancient Skepticism, unlike its modern versions, is not simply or primarily an epistemological theory; it is rather an *attitude* and, as such, a *practical* consideration, an *ethics*. It was said of Pyrrho that “he feared neither wagons nor precipices nor dogs,” and his philosophy was aimed, like that of the Stoics, at the attainment of human happiness.⁸³ Accordingly, Pyrrho recommended a life of simplicity; he placed no value at all on theoretical debate and aimed instead at a life of “psychic quietude” (*ataraxia*).⁸⁴ He was, perhaps, the only Greek philosopher who was influenced by the Orient, and he spent several years traveling to India and talking to holy men (Magi) there. His epistemological criticism—that our sense experience is contradictory and cannot tell us about the world—is to be understood in the context of these ethical views.⁸⁵ His insistence that it is useless to speculate about the nature of the reality behind the appearances was aimed, as in the Stoics and as in the quotation from Fichte above, to free us from fear, to make our lives more secure and tolerable. Its practical strategy was *silence*.

After Pyrrho, Skepticism became academic. And there is no such creature as a silent academic. It is arguable that Academic Skepticism is not so much an elaboration of Pyrrho’s views so much as a second version of this philosophy.⁸⁶ Under Arcesilaus and Carneades (3rd

82. Here, as before, I will distinguish more modern *scepticism*, as developed by Hume and utterly repudiated by Hegel, from ancient Skepticism, which Hegel praises as an attack on the dogmatism of common sense and “the untruth of the finite.” In an early review of Gottlob Ernst Schulze’s *Critique of Theoretical Philosophy* (1801) Hegel had contrasted the two (with Schulze, not Hume, as the modern representative) and called the modern version “anti-philosophy.” Though he utterly rejects Skepticism too, it at least deserves a place in the “History of Spirit,” which scepticism does not. Hume does not figure in any way in the section on “*Skeptizismus*”; in so far as he figures in the *PG* at all, it is only to be eliminated in the Introduction.

83. D. Hamlyn, on “Greek Philosophy After Aristotle” in O’Connor, p. 72; and Charlotte Stough, *Greek Skepticism* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 4.

84. Stough, pp. 4, 6.

85. Hamlyn, p. 73; Stough, pp. 16–34; Myles Burnyeat, “The Sceptic in his Place and Time” (unpublished essay): “a recipe for happiness.”

86. Stough, pp. 6, 35–66.

and second centuries B.C., respectively), Skepticism became the art of criticism and debate, and by arguing both sides of a question, the Skeptics often succeeded in demonstrating that there was no single correct answer and, therefore, no answer at all. The first part of this strategy obviously appealed to Hegel, for whom contradiction had become an important concept, particularly in Kant's antinomies; but the conclusion that, therefore, we could not know reality, would be equally unacceptable to him, for exactly the same reason that Kant's discussion of the antinomies was unacceptable; contradiction is a virtue, not a vice of reason. Contradictions show us—they do not hide from us—the nature of reality (203–5).

In the third and second centuries B.C., Skepticism and Stoicism were rival schools, and the criticisms of the first did much to transform the latter. In the following century or so, Skepticism remained alive but assumed a shadowy presence in philosophy, largely critical and, true to itself in one sense at least, it left nothing by way of tangible evidence.⁸⁷ It is only in the second century A.D., with Sextus Empiricus, that Stoicism finds its more durable voice and a willingness to commit the Skeptical philosophy to writing. In his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against the Mathematicians*, Sextus Empiricus describes with enthusiastic attention to detail the teachings of his predecessors.⁸⁸ But he too abstained from theory. For him as for Pyrrho, philosophy consisted of criticism, and its only use was to criticize and refute alternative philosophical views, especially Stoicism. The philosopher is like a man affected by an illness, he tells us (much like the later Wittgenstein); the Skeptic provides his cure. (Sextus Empiricus also happened to be a physician.)

Hegel confuses the rivalry between Stoicism and Skepticism;

Skepticism is the realization of that of which Stoicism was only the concept [*Begriff*], and is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is. This is *in itself* the negative and must exhibit itself as such. (*Phenomenology*, 202)

He says, rightly, that Skepticism dispenses with the notion of the reality of the world, but his way of putting it sounds too much as if Skepticism were a further metaphysical theory,—which was certainly not the case;⁸⁹

87. Stough on Aenesidemus and Agrippa, pp. 8–11 and ch. 4.

88. Stough, ch. 5.

89. Hamlyn, p. 74. Cf. "For whereas the dogmatizer posits the things about which he is said to be dogmatizing as really existent, the Skeptic does not posit these formulae in any absolute sense . . . the Skeptic enunciates his formulae so that they are virtually cancelled by themselves . . . without making any positive assertion regarding external realities." (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Chapter VII, 14–5).

With the reflection of self-consciousness into the simple thought of itself, the independent existence or permanent determinateness that stood over against that reflection has, as a matter of fact, fallen outside the infinitude of thought. . . .thought becomes the concrete thinking which annihilates the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness, and the negativity of free self-consciousness comes to know itself in the many and varied forms of life as a real negativity. (Ibid.)

Skepticism too is a reaction to the Master-Slave dilemma, and like Stoicism, it reacts by denying its reality. It rejects the possibility of understanding, as well as the importance of, the world. Stoicism appealed to an abstract confidence that the world itself was rational and meaningful; Skepticism denies this. But, Hegel points out (204), in denying the world the Skeptic must also deny his own relationship to it which, whatever the power of his arguments, is a *practical* impossibility. Thus the danger is that the arguments of the Skeptic will become pure "*sophistry*," compelling arguments that cannot possibly have any real application, and consequently are not really accepted even by the Skeptic himself. The argument against Skepticism, in other words, is the impossible contradiction between what it believes (or refuses to believe) about the world and the way one must actually act in it.

Its deeds and its word always belie one another and equally it has itself the doubly contradictory consciousness of unchangeableness and sameness, and of utter contingency and non-identity with itself. (205)

It does not believe what it says, and,

Its talk is in fact like the squabbling of self-willed children, one of whom says *A* if the other says *B*, and in turn says *B* if the other says *A*, and who by contradicting *themselves* buy for themselves the pleasure of continually contradicting *one another*. (205)

Thus Hegel sees Skepticism as not only escapist withdrawal from the world but as childish as well; it is not serious philosophy, nor does it even attempt to provide what philosophy ought to provide for us, a coherent and practicable view of the world. But behind this mainly moral criticism, an important philosophical criticism looms as well. The inconsistency of the Skeptic also lies in his uncritical emphasis on the purely "empirical" and "sensuous" aspects of experience, which it accepts as "real" apart from the world, an independent existence.⁹⁰ And this in turn is a metaphysical position—though unacknowl-

90. Cf. Sextus Empiricus' "empiricism" in which "sensibles" become the basis of all reality, somewhat as "Sense-Certainty" in the *PG*. See Stough, p. 107ff.

edged. But here Hegel uses the same objection he used against the modern sceptics, namely,—that the independent existence of such a consciousness is itself subject to serious scrutiny. The sceptic/Skeptic claims the independence of consciousness but in fact employs presuppositions and considerations drawn from the very world it claims to deny:

It lets the unessential content in its thinking vanish, but just in doing so it is the consciousness of something unessential. . . . It affirms the nullity of seeing, hearing, etc. but yet it is itself seeing, hearing, etc. (205)

The philosophical reader will recognize here a prefiguring of what later phenomenologists would call “intentionality,” and the utter absurdity of trying to talk about sense experience as a self-enclosed realm. But Hegel’s main complaint here is the uncritical inconsistencies of Skepticism—Hume’s denial of the laws of necessary causation as he walks over to the table to play a game of billiards. This is couched in the more profound but not very helpful language of a “dialectical unrest” (205) but the point is simple enough: withdrawal from the world simply doesn’t work. The world is too much with us, and no adequate world-view or “form of consciousness” can intelligibly deny that fact.

“UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS”

And yet we try. The misery of the world and our lust for freedom in this most extravagant of senses—as freedom from everyone and everything, goes still one step further. In Stoicism, thought itself is supposed to be freedom, and in Skepticism, this freedom can be made consistent only by denying the world but, inevitably, it is forced to recognize the reality of the world it denies, at least in practice. The next step is to view oneself *as* reality, at least as having reality within oneself. This yields a dual consciousness—a merely empirical, confused, and transient self (as in Skepticism) and an eternal, rational, *real* self, as in Stoicism (206). Hegel marks this progression as the realization of the Skeptic that he cannot both accept and deny the reality of the world, and so he “brings together the two thoughts which Skepticism holds apart”:

Skepticism’s lack of thought about itself must vanish, because it is in fact *one* consciousness which contains within itself these two modes. This new form is, therefore, one which *knows* that it is the dual con-

sciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is awareness of the contradictory nature of itself. (206)

Thus we become a single, contradictory, schizoid, and emphatically *unhappy* consciousness.

The “unhappy consciousness,” Hegel famously tells us, is “the duplication which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman . . . now lodged in one.” This has lead some readers to suppose some rather extravagant, even pathological interpretations,⁹¹ but the truth is quite simple, if we turn back, for the moment, to Hegel’s early manuscripts on religion: In his “Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” of 1798–99, Hegel writes of the Christian-Kantian-Fichtean who feels bound by universal Reason and duty within himself:

between the Shaman, the European prelate who rules the church and state, the Voguls and the Puritans, on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own commands of duty, on the other, the difference is not that the former have their lord outside themselves while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave.⁹²

Earlier in that same essay, Hegel discussed the story of Noah, who was given the Lord’s promise that he would never again destroy mankind, so long as men in turn obeyed his commandments⁹³ (182–83). It is this that forms the basis for the “unhappy consciousness,” the internalization of such outside threats and fears. The unhappy consciousness, in other words, is the Judeo-Christian tradition, “the fear of God in one’s own heart,” even if the name “God” never once appears.

The observation that the “unhappy consciousness” is *religious* is not new, needless to say; most commentators begin with this as obvious.⁹⁴ But what is just as obvious but not so often recognized is the extremely sarcastic tone in which the entire section is cast; Hegel despises traditional Christianity just as much in 1806 as he did in 1793, and his treatment of Catholicism is particularly vicious. It is curious, for instance, that despite their obvious importance, Hegel all but ignores the great Catholic thinkers, and the commentators too seem to accept this. Yet, the one figure who best captures the “spirit” of the “Unhappy Consciousness” is—St. Augustine. In the historical pro-

91. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, and Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: 1981).

92. “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” in Knox, trans. *Early Theo. Miss.*, p. 211.

93. *Ibid.* 182–83.

94. E.g., Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 117f; Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 98.

gression from Stoicism, culminating in the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius in the second century A.D., to Skepticism, as summarized by Sextus Empiricus in the second century too, Augustine fits in perfectly, following the intervening period of the Gnostics, Plotinus, and other varieties of neo-Platonist philosophy. Augustine's Christian philosophy was thoroughly dualistic, so painfully obvious in his own *Confessions*.⁹⁵ He saw himself torn between two selves, the bodily self of desire and needs in bewildering confusion, and the rational self of the will with its quest for unity with God and the eternal. Augustine, more than anyone except Kierkegaard (who was not born until six years after the publication of the *Phenomenology*) is the "unhappy consciousness." But Hegel doesn't even allude to him.⁹⁶

This, of course, is too simple. "Unhappy Consciousness" does not refer particularly to Augustine, but to the whole of a certain kind of religious consciousness, from the ancient Hebrews through Luther and the Reformation, which Nietzsche—following Hegel—called "slave religions". What these all have in common is a "soul of despair," an attempt to escape from the hardships of life through a metaphysical scheme, in which they themselves become at one with reality, if at the same time pathetic because of it. At every moment, Hegel tells us, the unhappy consciousness is driven out of the world of everyday life or the world of eternal, unchangeable reality "in the very moment when it imagines it has successfully attained to a peaceful unity with the other" (207). The unhappy consciousness sees itself torn between two forms of existence—a "natural" existence, in which relationships with other people and the desires of the body play an essential part, and a divine, other-worldly, eternal existence, which presupposes the rejection of the first. Nietzsche, years later, would extend the concept of the unhappy consciousness all the way back to Plato.⁹⁷ But Hegel sees clearly that, in the early Greeks, "otherworldly" metaphysics never led to a withdrawal from or denial of the world of everyday life. That particular move, which culminates in the flesh-despising epistles of St. Paul and the anti-bodily edicts of the medieval saints, presupposed

95. *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (London, 1944).

96. In the whole of Darrel Christensen's *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion* (Hague; Nijhoff, 1970), Augustine's name is mentioned only once, in a random list of important philosophers before Hegel. But the mystery deepens considerably when we see that Augustine is hardly discussed at all in Hegel's own *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, not at all in Harris's exhaustive survey of Hegel's early reading and influences. Why? The easy if unflattering answer was that Hegel hated Catholicism (Harris, pp. 21, 26, 45) and did not see it as appropriate even to deign to call Augustine a philosopher. Aquinas too gets short shrift, despite the fact that Hegel had either read or read about him. (See vol. 3, p. 80).

97. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (in Kaufmann, Viking Portable Nietzsche, 1964).

the general sense of “fear and bondage” and a “universal culture of thought” that Hegel anticipates in his discussion of Stoicism (199). It was one of the great accomplishments of human thought, in other words, that it had learned, over the course of centuries, to demean itself and reject the whole world.

Insofar as the “Unhappy Consciousness” plays an essential role in the dialectic of “Self-Consciousness,” the particular movements within it—which in fact represent not only the increasingly desperate logic of the world-withdrawal but the actual history of religion as well—might better be discussed later on, when we discuss Hegel’s philosophy of religion as such.⁹⁸ For now, it will be enough to sketch a general structural outline of this form of consciousness, and St. Augustine can serve as our starting point.

It is God and my soul I want to know.—Nothing else?—No; nothing whatever.⁹⁹

Thus Augustine summarizes his view of the world, and “unhappy consciousness” too: Two consciousnesses—divine and mine—in seclusion from the world of desire and other people. But two consciousnesses too that rage against one another, not just as Platonic parts of the soul but as absolutely incompatible and mutually destructive combatants (208). One part, unchangeable and essential (*das Unwandelbare, wesentliche*) can only make the other part, changeable and inessential (*das Wandelbare, unwesentliche*) feel hopelessly inadequate. And, indeed, this is precisely what makes the “unhappy consciousness” so unhappy—not mere schizophrenia but the ultimate in self-debasement and self-denial.

In Stoicism and Skepticism, the frustrated seeker after a dubious freedom turned against the world, only to find, inevitably, that the world and its troubles are too much with us. Or rather, we are too much with them, and so the next conceptual step is obvious—we must deny ourselves as well. In favor of what? In Stoicism, we have already learned that the world has Reason which transcends our ordinary experience; in Skepticism our ability to understand this ultimate Reason is denied, but the concept is already established. Thus Hegel rightly recognizes (though he doesn’t say this in the *Phenomenology*) that Judaism and the religion of the ancient Hebrews has much in common with Stoicism, and pre-figures the “unhappy consciousness” in several important ways. Judaism too rejects the world of the Romans and sees itself as facing an infinite and all-powerful consciousness, the Reason

98. “The Secret of Hegel: Kierkegaard’s Complaint,” chap. 10.

99. Augustine, *Soliloquies*, i.2.7.

of the world, compared to which we are pitiful and inadequate creatures but still, "the chosen people." It too compares the eternity of God with the mere transience of all of us and the things that we value (*Ecclesiastes*, notably). But, the Jews, unlike Christianity, strictly hold to a unified view of God, which, by way of Spinoza, certainly appealed to Hegel too. For the Jews, the sense of community had not been eclipsed by faith and dogma, and for the Jews (as for the Stoics) the belief in an immortal God did not bestow on them as individuals the same immortality. Despite Hegel's hardly complimentary attitudes toward the Jews¹⁰⁰ he would have seen in them much that both made possible the advent of Christianity and, less obviously, would make possible a new stage of religious experience which was just now, in the new German philosophy, being formulated.

This new self-affirming religion, however, is yet to be realized. Hegel's concern here is rather the traditional turn against oneself. It is a mistake, I think, to take the "Unhappy Consciousness" section to be primarily about the nature of God or religion or immortality.¹⁰¹ It is first of all a study of self-consciousness divided against itself, an attempt to do away with one's worldly self and thus "freeing" oneself from worldly dependency and coming to recognize oneself as at one with the whole of eternity. God (unnamed) is the eternal, projected by human consciousness by way of appeal. It is the opposite of Fichte's "Absolute ego," which posits individuals; individuals, already unhappy about the dependencies of life, posit the Absolute Ego. And, of course, it is this historical-conceptual move that makes the Fichtean-Hegelian position possible. But the conceptual move backfires, as Nietzsche pointed out more poignantly several decades later, "Man erects an ideal—the 'holy God'—and in the face of it is forced to a pathetic certainty of our own unimportance."¹⁰² It becomes a battle within oneself, "a struggle with an enemy" (*ein Kampf gegen ein Feind*; (209)).

The actual progression of the "unhappy consciousness" should be discussed not here, in the midst of this somewhat perverse discussion of "freedom," but later on, in our discussion of Hegel's philosophy of religion. For our purposes here, it is enough to say that the section is a Nietzschean progression of a series of "nay-sayings," increasingly

100. In the Positivity-essay and "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," in *Early Theo. Mss.*

101. Cf. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 98f., who takes this section to be "medieval Christendom," and Taylor too (*Hegel*, p. 160). But cf. Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 117ff., and Findlay's comment in his "Analysis" of the *PG*, Miller tr., p. 527.

102. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Kaufmann trans. (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 93.

desperate rejections of the secular world and oneself as a secular being. This includes virtually the whole history of Christianity, from its roots in the Old Testament (God the “Unchangeable” as an “alien” Being, passing judgment upon us (210)) to the medieval Catholic church (“purity of consciousness” and “devotion” (214)) to the Reformation (the secular world as “sanctified” and salvation through work (219–22)) and, most desperately, to its culmination in self-despising asceticism (“the enemy reveals himself as flesh” (225)). From the schizoid split between two selves, one secular and one eternal, Christianity is thus viewed as the ever more degrading attempt to be rid of the secular self. For those who interpret Hegel and his *Phenomenology* as a “Christian” apology—however heretical, this section should prove a powerful antidote. His unhappiness with the gloomy mood of Christianity in his early manuscripts is with him still, even if, in a sudden upswing at the end of the section, he then announces that, in its unhappiness, consciousness has opened up the way to “Reason” (230). But what he is really saying here is that, having denied ourselves and the world so absurdly, there is nothing to do but swing around in compensation, and embrace the world, and ourselves, once again.

Kant always and everywhere recognizes that Reason, as the dimensionless activity, as pure concept of infinitude is held fast in its opposition to the finite. He recognizes that in this opposition Reason is an absolute, and hence a pure identity without intuition and in itself empty. But there is an immediate contradiction in this: this infinitude, strictly conditioned as it is by its abstraction from its opposite, and being strictly nothing outside of this antithesis, is yet at the same time held to be absolute spontaneity and autonomy. As freedom, Reason is supposed to be absolute, yet the essence of this freedom consists in being solely through an opposite.¹⁰³

103. “Faith and Knowledge,” p. 181. See Murray Greene, on “Hegel’s ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ and Nietzsche’s ‘Slave Morality’” in Christenson, ed, p. 125.

Chapter Eight (a)

Another Note on Reason and the Dialectic

The critical philosophy has indeed turned metaphysics into logic, but—as already mentioned—like the later idealism it shied at the object, and gave to logical determinations an essentially subjective signification; thus both the critical philosophy and the later idealism remained saddled with the Object which they shunned, and for Kant a “thing-in-itself,” for Fichte an abiding “resistance-principle,” was left over as an unconquerable other. But that freedom from the opposition of consciousness, which logic must be able to assume, lifts these thought-determinations above such a timid and incomplete point of view, and requires that those determinations should be considered not with any such limitation and reference, but as they are in and for themselves, as logic, as pure reason. —Hegel, *Science of Logic*

On our reading here, “Self-Consciousness” is something of an interruption, a digression in an otherwise straightforward progression of alternative conceptions of knowledge. Indeed, the progression from chapter 3 (“Force and the Understanding”) to chapter 5 (on “Observational Reason” and teleological explanation) is exactly the progression we find in Schelling’s and Hegel’s (later) philosophy of nature. The transition from the very Kantian discussion of “Understanding” may connect up unproblematically with the very Fichtean discussion of “life” and “Self-Certainty” at the beginning of chapter 4, but it ties up just as well with the discussion—also Fichte—of the “Certainty and Truth of Reason” that begins chapter 5. One might suggest, according to the general line of German Idealism, that both Part A (“Consciousness”) and Part B (“Self-Consciousness”) are intended not so much to lead one into the other but rather *both* of them turn into “Reason” in chapter 5. Thus, where Fichte begins with the “I” and then turns to the “non-I,” Hegel begins with the “non-I” and turns instead to the “I.”

It is also possible, however, to read the first two parts of the *Phenom-*

enology as a quasi-historical progression—or rather, as two quasi-historical progressions: from the ontological queries of the early Greeks in “Consciousness” to the post-Aristotelean philosophies of the Stoics and Skeptics to early Christianity, or from the beginnings of modern philosophy (Locke in the Introduction, Berkeley, Leibniz, and Kant in subsequent chapters) to Fichte throughout the whole of chapter 4 (even including “Unhappy Consciousness,” since Fichte too is always looking for God “beyond” ordinary experience (despite the fact that Hegel tells us, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, that Fichte is perfectly “happy” in other aspects of his philosophy¹). Of course, there is no need to choose between these interpretations or to tie them down too tightly to any particular texts or philosophers, but there is one problem that remains for any of these interpretations, and that is the awkward transition from “Unhappy Consciousness” at the end of chapter 4 into “Reason” at the beginning of chapter 5. On the last, more modernistic interpretation, it is not too problematic to read “the Unhappy Consciousness” as the failure of Fichte’s philosophy to achieve (in Hegel’s terms in “Faith and Knowledge”) “unity with the infinite Idea,” that is, a sense of synthesis and harmony with the natural and the spiritual world. Of course, this leaves us without any way of interpreting most of the content of that section, but it does give us a familiar way of making the bridge into “Reason,” which we can thereby interpret as Schelling’s philosophy, in the light of Hegel’s own *Differenz*-essay of 1801 in which he compared the two in similar terms. But whatever might be said in favor of this view, the overwhelming objection to it is that it utterly emasculates the *Phenomenology* and turns it into a merely provincial philosophical exercise—no more ambitious in its scope (though different in style) than the *Differenz*-essay. But when Hegel boldly announces, in the beginning of chapter 5, that reason sees itself as all reality, he is making a claim which must not just be understood academically, and certainly not merely in terms of his ex-colleague Schelling. It is a bold idealistic claim about the world and our place within it, and nothing less.

The key question, which indeed was inherent in Schelling but now becomes Hegel’s own, is this: *how did human consciousness get so out of touch with itself and the world?!* What started as perfectly common-sense knowledge of objects ended up in the absurdity of the “inverted world”; and what began as simple self-knowledge—as in Descartes’s apparently innocent *Cogito*, ended up in the intolerable self-denial of the “Unhappy Consciousness.” In terms of the two parts of the book we

1. *Lectures*, vol. 3, p. 488.

have covered so far, we might say that they represent a single problem over-all—our misusing concepts in such a way that we have “abstracted” ourselves from the world. Our different forms of conceiving of ourselves and the world have had the tragic consequence that we have lost the very sense that we started with, that we do indeed know the world and that we are, indeed, substantial and real beings-in-the-world. In terms of the history of Western thinking, the same point can be made in a more general, cultural way: we have split ourselves apart through conceptual thought; we have made distinctions that, in some particular contexts, might well be valuable but, rendered in the all-embracing terms of philosophy, they lead to intolerable conclusions. The distinction between the contributions of the subject to experience and the objective nature of experience might serve us well when we are struggling our way through a hallucination or an optical illusion, but it is disastrous when turned into the basis of epistemology as such. The distinction between “real self” and the “external” trappings of self might be useful enough when trying to decide on a career or a college major, but it is pathological when taken seriously as a philosophical distinction and leads us increasingly to look “deeper and deeper” into ourselves instead of participating in the world. What we find in ourselves is less and less, finally only a pathetic “soul,” cut off from reality and other people, striving after the “infinite” and wholly unhappy in the finite everyday world.

In this light, the transition from Parts A and B to “Reason” becomes, though Hegel certainly would not say so, a return to sanity and common sense. When he tells us that through reason we see ourselves as the whole of reality, Hegel is saying that we won’t understand ourselves at all so long as we insist on abstracting ourselves from the world, and, on the other side, that we will not understand the world so long as we insist on understanding it in isolation from the observing self—a common enough conclusion today among physicists too (belatedly among some psychologists as well). To understand the contrasting exhilaration with which Hegel launches into “Reason” from the “Unhappy Consciousness,” one does not need an elaborate and ultimately implausible idealist metaphysics nor the insufferable jargon of “the infinite”; here is a down-to-earth philosopher coming back home, after wandering through the fascinating but ultimately impossible visions of the great philosophers of the past, with their visions of other worlds more “real” than this one, with their reductive methods according to which the most simple human experiences become questionable, with their grand conceptions of the meaning of life which render life utterly meaningless. “Reason” is ultimately the unobjec-

tionable view that the distinctions of philosophy have to be understood in their particular contexts, and that the understanding of those contexts presupposes a *holistic* view of the world and oneself, an often unspoken backdrop of public practices and rituals and work and emotions and, not least, *language*—which at one and the same time makes comprehension possible and gives rise to the concepts which have been responsible for our conceptual fragmentation of the world.

It is in “Reason” that Hegel begins to realize his youthful dream, with Hölderlin more than Schelling, of a vision of life that is happy and meaningful, in which the stagnation of German society would be replaced by the vitality of the French Revolution, but without the violence. (The German “Spirit” would prevent the vacuum that brought about the Terror.) It is in “Reason” that the abstract questions about the nature of knowledge and the ultimate reality of the self give rise to more concrete and practical questions about the good life, about the right way to live, about virtue, belonging and happiness. In fact, although it is hardly talked about at all, the entire long Part C on “Reason” is mainly about *happiness*—or what Aristotle called “*Eudaimonia*” (“doing well”). It is in this light that I have included the first part of chapter 5, on “Observational Reason,” back with the more theoretical concerns of chapters 1–3. For the answer to the “Unhappy Consciousness,” not just in the *Phenomenology* but in our common experience too, is *activity*. The life of contemplation isn’t much of an ideal if all that there is to contemplate is one’s own inadequacy in opposition to some ideal “beyond.” In the leap from that unhappy contemplation, the usual first move, not perhaps a matter of logic but certainly a familiar progression, is to straight-out hedonism. Thus Augustine lamented, “Lord make me chaste; but not yet,” and the miserably unhappy Kierkegaard, while still a young man, temporarily abandoned his stance as spokesman for the Unchangeable to indulge in a year of unabashed libertinism. It is a leap which we find again and again in the literature, and in our own undergraduates. It is hardly to be called, as Hegel announces it at the end of chapter 4 (230), a leap to “Reason” as we usually think of it. But it is, in the sense I am defending here, quite obviously a leap back into the world, an attempt to become at one with it in the crude fashion we earlier considered in the discussion of “desire”; by eating it, drinking it, loving it, *wallowing* in it, until, a few days or pages of the *Phenomenology* later, we find the world once again too much with us, and so try to “find ourselves” in a more moderate, if not more modest, philosophy.

Before we launch into the middle of chapter 5, however, and take

up hedonism ("Pleasure and Necessity") as our new form of consciousness, this might be an ideal time to stop and look back over the terrain we have covered, to get a more panoramic view of the shifts in the "dialectic" and the patterns that might be found there.

When we discussed the details of a single "dialectical" transition, from Hegel's first chapter "Sense-Certainty" to his second chapter "Perception," we were concerned mainly with the dynamics of the argument, which were: first, by forcing a view to become more and more articulate and committed to itself, we show (in its own terms) that it contains fatal flaws, whether straightforward contradictions or some logically lesser flaw—for example, the grotesque unhappiness of the "Unhappy Consciousness" or the philosophical hypocrisy of the Skeptic. Second, a new view is postulated which, at least at the time, seems to correct the major flaws of the last one. In our presentation of the various steps in the *Phenomenology* since then, we have tried to make these two steps translucent wherever possible, and the over-all movement of the book, therefore, should now appear as a sequence of sometimes desperate leaps, not always toward something wholly specific ("determinate") but away from a form of consciousness which is no longer tolerable. Of course, one always steps away from something in the direction of something else, and in the course of the *Phenomenology* we habitually characterize this as "a more adequate conception of experience." But this is indeed limp as a characterization and, in any case, the next step is often adopted as hurriedly as the last one was relinquished; one need only think of the rapid progression of viewpoints through which a freshman philosophy student proceeds in a single argument with his teacher. Nevertheless, we have moved far enough along to see if, in this sequence of leaps, there is any distinguishable pattern that emerges.

I believe that there is such a pattern, and it is this; the first step in each pattern is one of *certainty*—most prominently, "Sense-Certainty" and "Self-Certainty" in chapters 1 and 4 respectively (and now, "The Certainty and Truth of Reason" in chapter 5). In every case, "certainty" refers to a certain stubborn naïveté, a first grasping of a viewpoint that, on the slightest examination, turns out to be highly problematic. Sense-certainty, for example, is the naïve assurance of common sense that objects are real, given to us in experience and knowable, in their entirety, without any problem at all. Self-certainty is the Cartesian-Fichtean *cogito*, that innocent formulation of the most rudimentary philosophical certainty of one's own existence ("After all, surely I must exist even if it is only to be fooled about everything"). Reason is simi-

larly “certain” of its own “being-in-the-world,” to use again the appropriate Heideggerian piece of jargon. It is not naïve, perhaps, in the sense of the common sense certainty of that fictional character philosophers sometimes refer to as “the man on the street,” but it is naïve as a new freshman idealist is naïve, sure of himself in an empty way, certain that life is meaningful without knowing much of it yet, sure that scientists can find the answers, even if he does not yet know the questions, sure that philosophers can be answered, if only they’d stop asking questions.

Even in this three-step sequence, we also recognize a general set of moves that is familiar to us in our reading; most obviously, there is the shift from concern about the object (the existence and our knowledge of things) to the subject (our concern for ourselves) to some new sense of self-in-the-world, and indeed, for example, in “Sense-Certainty,” we find that Hegel pursues his arguments along just this pattern, first challenging one’s naïve certainty of the existence of objects, then briefly challenging the certainty we supposedly have of our own existence as particular subjects, then considering the unity of experience as “my-immediate-awareness-of-this-object” (103f). The same pattern more loosely interpreted begins to look like a common pattern in philosophical thinking in general—a rather dogmatic assertion of a position; the withdrawal of the position as “just my own opinion,” and then the elaboration of that opinion with reasons and arguments and a new kind of confidence.

This turns out to be the most essential pattern of the “dialectic” of the *Phenomenology*: an attitude of confidence, then confusion, withdrawal, desperation, or doubt; finally a new reconciliation and confidence. This pattern of three should not be interpreted as “thesis-antithesis-synthesis,” however, for only occasionally is the second phase literally the contradictory or even a contrary of the first, and the final stage is not always a synthesis of the first two. Indeed, there are often four or five steps in the process, and, to make matters much more complicated, the pattern can be found within stages of the over-all pattern as well. For example, the general tenor of “Self-Consciousness” might be interpreted as a partial retreat from questions about knowledge as such—and Hegel and Schelling both so considered Fichte’s philosophy. Within “Self-Consciousness,” we find a progression from certainty (the *cogito*, Fichte’s intuition of Self) to the various dilemmas of Master-Slave and Stoical despair and Skeptical doubts, to “Unhappy Consciousness” (which is *surely* neither a synthesis nor a reconciliation, but only, as Hegel puts it, “the Master-Slave relationship within a single consciousness”). The reconciliation comes next, in

"Reason," with the sudden rejection of just that distinction (between essential unchangeable self and inessential changing self) that made chapter 4 end so unhappily. Moreover, within those stages, there are parallel shifts too, for instance, the slave's despair with his dependency, followed by a first glimpse of independence, the Stoic's suicidal despair turning into an abstract sense of identity with "the True and the Good" (200), the various stages of Christian consciousness from devotion to doubt, to good works to doubt again, to the wholesale despair of asceticism and a sense of salvation through Christ and the church. This is not to say that any particular form of consciousness need be readily identified as "confidence" or "despair" ("Unhappy Consciousness" is far more emotionally complex than that). But it is to say that the pattern of movement between the steps in the *Phenomenology* (and within sections as well) is discernible. It is not, as it sometimes seems on an overview, arbitrariness or chaos.

The pattern of Hegel's strategy can also be described in terms of an over-all tendency, at every stage, to move from the particular to the general, to see all distinctions in terms of the larger context, to define all individuals by reference to the world in which they are found. In Part A ("Consciousness") this was most evident in the move from "Sense-Certainty" and its ostensible particulars ("this") to universal properties and concepts. In Part B ("Self-Consciousness") the general move was from the particular selves of inter-personal relationships to the universal sense of selfhood of Christianity. In Part C ("Reason") we shall see a series of moves again from the individual and his or her desires, needs, pleasures, and virtues to the larger context of society and the social order, and finally, to a grand sense of the unity of humanity writ cosmic as "Spirit." The philosophical point that is made over and over again, albeit in very different contexts and in very different ways, is this: all distinctions, ultimately, are made by "the Concept," that is, by us as well as within the world. There are no differences or distinctions except those which are bound by our concepts and by context. Much of Hegel's sleight-of-pen can be appreciated quite easily in the light of this general point. However confusing it may be when he seems to deny the reality of particulars or individuals or scientific laws, what he is actually doing is insisting on the contextual dependence of these conceptions and their utter arbitrariness apart from such contexts. But, at the same time, Hegel is always arguing that the mere postulation of that over-all context—whether Fichte's "self as everything" or Schelling's "absolute Identity"—is equally empty and arbitrary without the distinctions that carve up this whole into meaningful conceptual units—objects, creatures, individual per-

sons, and communities. Thus we can understand the patterns in the *Phenomenology* in another way, not only as moves from naïve certainty to doubt to renewed reflective confidence, but as constant shiftings back and forth across the conceptual backdrop of our experience, emphasizing now the representation as a whole and then highlighting a particular feature, always pointing out the way that the particulars form the content of the pattern as well as the way that the particulars themselves are defined only by the patterns within which they immediately appear.

This is not, perhaps, the rigorous logic that some commentators have hoped or expected to find in the *Phenomenology*. But then again, it is not uncommon to believe, mistakenly, that Hegel's whole purpose is to reduce the complexity of human experience to a single, simple logical principle, which will emerge triumphantly at the end of each of his books as "the Absolute". But *the* much-touted "Absolute" is more of a principle of irreducible complexity than it is the final solution to the confusions of philosophy. The pattern in the *Phenomenology*, while something less than a rigorous set of deductions, is still much more ordered than arbitrary, and it does, if only one will allow for it, form an organic whole. As Hegel said of history, "to him who looks at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back"² So it is too with a reading of the *Phenomenology*.

Regarding the overall structure of Part "C" ("Reason"), the reader should again be forewarned that some very odd shifts are about to take place. The seventh chapter on "Religion," for example, explicitly begins the entire *Phenomenology* over again, and the extraordinary assortment of topics that make up Hegel's ethics is peculiarly divided between two different chapters, the first of which is part of the discussion of the teleology of nature we just finished and the second of which includes ingredients that more plausibly belong to the chapter on "Religion." Indeed, insofar as we seem forever compelled to outline books in more or less linear graphic images, one might suggest again that these various sections do not progress from one to another so much as overlap and turn back on one another, like so many parallel layers of a Viennese torte. There is a progression, if you like, of a very general kind, which we can summarize in a phrase as a movement from the individual to the universal, but any attempt to distinguish a straightforward movement from one step to another—however these steps are interpreted—is more likely to do Hegel a disservice rather than clarify him. Indeed, by all accounts, it is at this point (if

2. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction ("Reason in History"), p. 13.

not before) that the composition of the *Phenomenology* turns to chaos, a collage of ideas rather than a philosophical argument of any kind. And yet, as in the complex and chaotic canvas of a Delacroix, there is yet a distinctive set of motions and patterns, a singular theme and a readily identifiable representation—even if, on a piecemeal analysis, the *Gestalt* of this singular theme and readily identifiable representation might be almost impossible to perceive.

Chapter Nine

Hegel's Ethics (chapter 5, parts B and C; chapter 6)

Concrete ethics as [Hegel] expounds it is part of the life of the national community, and no national community is all-embracing. It follows that, despite certain liberal elements in his theory, Hegel is advocating a closed rather than an open morality. If he is to be consistent he must demand that the moral agent be actuated by the thought of the good of the fellow-members of his group rather than that of men as men. He must stress virtues like loyalty and patriotism which rest on principles which cannot be universalized just because they involve a particular reference. And if he does that he faces the charge of being a moral reactionary, whose theories cannot expect to get serious consideration from civilised persons. —W.H. Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics*

Hegel has a long-standing reputation as a moral and political reactionary, especially because of the almost wholly unjustified polemic waged against him by Sir Karl Popper in his *Open Society and Its Enemies*, in the post-World War II years.¹ It is true that Hegel defends certain theses abhorrent to contemporary transcendental liberalism, for example, the importance of patriotism and, vis-à-vis the state, the relative unimportance of any given individual. He sees some virtue in war, for which we express our unmitigated horror, and he defends as the central thesis of his entire philosophy the view that morals are a product of and intelligible only in the context of a particular community, thus ignoring—though not denying—the comfortable pretense that *our* morality, derived as it is from God Himself, is the *only* possible morality.

I do not find this view “reactionary.” It is indeed a move backwards from the view that I have called “the transcendental pretense”—the view that our (European, mainly male, middle-class) morality is in-

1. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1954).

deed the only code of ethics worthy of the name.² But to correct excessive ethnocentrism hardly counts as mere "reaction", much less should this more humble moral view be eschewed or ignored by "civilised persons." In fact, Hegel's ethics resembles nothing so much as the ethics of Plato and Aristotle, a resemblance he points out for us himself in his later *Philosophy of Right*.³ It is an elaborate description of the actual ideals (though not, necessarily the common practice) of a particular society.⁴ It is not the attempt to provide—as Kant had attempted to provide—a single universal theory of The Good and The Right, although most of what Hegel says obviously applies not only to his particular niche in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Middle-class European culture but more or less to most modern states as well. Ethics, for Hegel, is *community* ethics. As communities grow and consolidate into an international community—as they were doing so dramatically during the writing of the *Phenomenology*—this ethics *becomes* more or less a universal ethics. But that is a matter of development, not an *a priori* fact about morality—as Kant had argued. Ethics begins—and ends—in the community; the universal moral law is at most one of its products, or worse, the rules of a single society turned into stone tablets, to be imposed on everyone else, regardless of local custom or cultural inclinations.⁵

Ethics, the search for the good life and the conception of the ideal human community, spans virtually half of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, from "Reason" and "Rational Self-Consciousness" (347) to "The Beautiful Soul" (671), and this is not counting the whole of chapter 4, which is arguably "ethical" as well. In Anglo-American philosophy, "ethics" is often equated with moral philosophy, as the study of right and wrong.

2. I have argued this thesis at length in my *History and Human Nature*, p. xiiff.

3. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 10. Unless otherwise noted, all numbers refer to paragraphs, not pages.

4. Walsh, (*Hegelian Ethics*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969) begins his good little book with a distinction between Kant's ethics of moral advice and Hegel's ethics of pure description (p. 6f.). He qualifies this distinction, but I think it is important to insist that neither Hegel nor Plato and Aristotle be interpreted as merely descriptive of actual practices; they are describing *ideals* and therefore "giving advice," at least in the sense of reminding people what they in fact do value, which is, of course, what Kant claims to be doing too. What is problematic here is not the difference in ethical approaches between Kant and Hegel concerning prescription versus description but the glib distinction between "prescription and description" itself.

5. Thus I would disagree with Walsh's negative conclusion that "Hegel's ethical theory, if carried to its logical conclusion, involves the dissolution of ethics into sociology" (p. 95). What is "dissolved" is the pretense that the analysis of one's own moral formulae *guarantees* an understanding of the Good *as such*. This is not to say that one is limited to local values and customs (or what is today usually called "moral relativism") but it is to insist that the extension of one's own values is at least an open question, not an *a priori* assurance. (Talking about "men as men" or "human nature" only pushes this problem back one more step; it in no way solves it.)

In German Idealism, on the other hand, "ethics" (or *Sittlichkeit*) includes questions of morality as but one of its elements; indeed, even in Kant, ethics as "practical reason" included not only questions of duty and happiness but the fundamental questions of theology and religious practice as well.⁶ In Fichte, whose whole philosophy was centered on the phenomenon of "practical reason," ethics even included knowledge and transcendental logic. So, for Hegel, the topic of ethics includes nothing less than the search for the good life, the concept of community and the state, the formation of modern society and the whole of history, as well as morality and much of what we would call sociology and certain aspects of religious practice.

It will help if we repeat the outline of these various "forms of (ethical) consciousness." Immediately after the "phrenology" episode of chapter 5, it begins;

REASON (Chapter 5)

- B. The actualization of rational self-consciousness through its own activity
 - a. Pleasure and Necessity
 - b. The law of the heart and the frenzy of self-conceit
 - c. Virtue and the way of the world
- C. Individuality which takes itself to be real and for itself
 - a. The spiritual animal kingdom and deceit, or "the matter in hand" itself
 - b. Reason as lawgiver
 - c. Reason as testing laws

SPIRIT (Chapter 6)

- A. The *true* Spirit. The ethical order
 - a. The ethical world. Human and Divine Law: Man and Woman
 - b. Ethical action. Human and Divine knowledge. Guilt and Destiny
 - c. Legal status
- B. Self-alienated Spirit. Culture
 - I. The world of self-alienated Spirit
 - a. Culture and its realm of actuality
 - b. Faith and pure insight
 - II. The Enlightenment
 - a. The struggle of the Enlightenment with Superstition
 - b. The truth of Enlightenment
 - III. Absolute Freedom and Terror

6. This is particularly evident in the structure of the second *Critique (of Practical Reason)* in which the last full third is devoted to these questions, but it is also present in a more modest way in the final chapter of his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals (FMM)* of 1785—trans. L.W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959). All references

- C. Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality
 - a. The moral view of the world
 - b. Dissemblance or duplicity
 - c. Conscience. The 'beautiful soul', evil and its forgiveness

Sections B and C of chapter 5 should probably best be viewed as more or less continuous with chapter 4 and "Unhappy Consciousness." Their linkage to section A ("Observing Reason") has much more to do with the structure of Kantian philosophy (the divisions of "theoretical and practical reason" as opposed to mere "understanding") than to the structure of the arguments. The division between chapter 5 and chapter 6 lends itself to a disastrous misunderstanding—namely that individuality and rationality are possible *prior* to membership in a particular ethical community—which Hegel considers sheer nonsense.⁷ Notice too that Kant's morality appears twice—at the ends of both chapters 5 and 6,⁸ and notice too that chapter 6, which is ostensibly historical, is by no means a complete outline of Western history. In fact, it is hardly history at all.

To put this enormous amount of material in order, three key terms and four ingredients should help us. The terms are, first of all, "ethics" or *Sittlichkeit*, which might be translated simply as "communal life"; "Spirit" or *Geist*, which for our purposes here we might think of just as "community spirit", that familiar sense of *belonging*; and, finally, reason, or *Vernunft*, which here is always to be taken as *practical* reason (insofar as "practical and "theoretical" can be distinguished properly at all). All of these terms are familiar to us, the first from Hegel's earlier writings, particularly the "Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" and "Natural Law," the latter two from earlier parts of the *Phenomenology*. In a crude sense, the three are co-extensive, since it is "Spirit" that makes ethics possible and "reason" that defines the activity of Spirit (as "purposive activity," Hegel told us, in the Preface (22)). In his separation of "Reason" and "Spirit" into two chapters, Hegel gives the unfortunate impression that the first is strictly individual and the latter communal, but it is important to remember that, despite Hegel's extremely awkward double numbering of the chapters, the "C"

to *Foundations* . . . will be abbreviated *FMM* and refer to page numbers in the original German edition by the Royal Prussian Academy in Berlin, vol. 4 (1911) (bracketed in Beck).

7. This is Hegel's argument against all forms of "social contract theory." In the *PG*, this begins in chapter 4 with "Master-Slave" and continues through chapter 6.

8. The three sections on Kant, the two short sections in "Reason," and the long section at the end of "Spirit" correspond more or less to the three chapters of Kant's *FMM*. The first is an analysis of "morality"; the second is an attempt to provide examples and show how moral laws and "the categorical imperative" can be put to use; the third is a discussion of the presuppositions or "postulates" of morality, including what Kant calls the "*Summum Bonum*," the commensuration of virtue and happiness.

part of the *Phenomenology* in fact includes everything from chapter 5 on. *One* aspect of reason is its interpretation as an individual faculty—in Kant, the faculty of the universal within the individual. But this is precisely the view of Reason that Hegel rejects, insisting instead that individual reason is not only learned from but conceptually dependent upon membership in a community, and this is precisely what Kant would have denied.⁹

“Sittlichkeit”

Sittlichkeit is introduced into Hegel’s early writings as a term uniquely suited to the community spirit of the Greek *polis* and folk religion, in contrast to the individual and overly theoretical doctrines of early Christianity. In the “Natural Law” essay, *Sittlichkeit* is used in contrast to Kant’s concept of “morality,” and as a synthesis of Fichte’s intolerable tension between morality, on the one hand, and law on the other. *Sittlichkeit* consists mainly of community practices, rituals, unspoken as well as explicit rules and roles into which every community member is born and in terms of which he or she defines not only self-identity but the seemingly absolute order of the world. Thus, in Hegel’s early writings, it is *Sittlichkeit* that, in effect, invents and projects God and gods for its own purposes. In modern society, it is *Sittlichkeit* that has invented individualism and what we (*à la* Kant) call “morality,” which in fact is a merely formal canonization of a few of the implicit rules which delimit our social practices.

For our purposes here, it is most important to remember that *Sittlichkeit* or “ethics” includes virtually everything that bonds a community together, family feelings, sex, revolutionary ideologies, cocktail party conversation, even hypocrisy (insofar as hypocrisy presupposes a shared sense of correctness which can be mocked and violated). It is this concept that explains the odd assortment of inclusions in chapter 6, for it is necessary to understand the ethics of a people just as much in terms of their history and family life as it is in terms of the tablet of judgments which they have elevated to divine moral status. It is this that would so horrify Kant, of course. Kant would analyze the Ten Commandments as a list of categorical imperatives, defensible by pure practical reason. Hegel would ignore such purely formal analysis altogether and look instead at the whole history of the He-

9. “If the will seeks the law that is to determine it *anywhere else* than in the fitness of its maxims for its own making of universal law—the result is always *heteronomy*. In that case the will does not give itself the law . . . (but rather) an alien interest” (*FMM*, 88–89).

brews, their political fortunes and social necessities and, in particular, the socio-psychological hypothesis that the very paternal social structure of the Jews *required* them to project an external authority, whether God Himself or the abstract laws supposedly given to Moses by Him.¹⁰ But this too is *Sittlichkeit*, even if it is not, for most philosophers, "morality". *Sittlichkeit* is the whole social fabric; morality is at most a few key threads that may—or may not—hold the rest of the fabric together.

"Spirit"

At the very beginning of chapter 6, Hegel tells us that "true Spirit" (*der wahre Geist*) is *Sittlichkeit* (which Miller and Baillie translate as "ethical order"). The immediate contrast here is Hegel's discussion of Kant's concept of "morality," but the more general contrast is with the whole tradition of individualism, including not only Kant's notion of individual rational autonomy but even the "state of nature" allegories of Hobbes and Rousseau, in which fully formed but isolated individuals meet and fight and, in Hegel's Fichtean rendition, emerge not with a social contract but as master and slave. "Spirit" is that primary sense of unity *within* which the formal rules of morality are given their meaning, *within* which the various attempts are made to put the community into order and form a government, *within* which the various individuals gain their identity and are enabled to claim *rights* for themselves and recognize their *duties*. By the end of the *Phenomenology*, *Geist* or Spirit will have become elevated (or *aufgehoben*) to the status of the Absolute, to a more or less "divine" principle operating through all of us and using us for its purposes. But this grand metaphor of Hölderlin's is not yet appropriate at this point in the *Phenomenology*, and "Spirit" is perfectly secular and familiar; it refers to that shared sense of community, whether in the intimacy of the family or the alienated abstractions of the Roman Empire and the modern state. It is at every point to be contrasted with that false sense of autonomous individuality—individuals as atoms out of which the complex molecule, the community, and then the State, are formed.

"Reason"

"Reason" and "rationality" have so many meanings in Hegel that the terms are all but useless in the abstract. In general, "reason" means

10. This was Hegel's hypothesis in his early essays, the starting point of both his Positivity-essay and his "Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" (in Knox, *Early Theo. Mss.*).

only “having a purpose,” and is contrasted with very little except, perhaps, more specific and overly theoretical interpretations of reason (*vs.* “understanding”) which lose this grand generality. In the chapter on “Reason” (chapter 5), “reason” refers to a sense of unity, between “subject and object” in the jargon of the times, and this is the meaning that Hegel had learned from Kant and Schelling, in particular. Thus, in the first third of that chapter (“Observing Reason”) Hegel gives us his “Philosophy of Nature”, in which the Schellingian point is made that we can understand nature because we are at one with it; nature’s laws are our laws too (or rather, nature derives its laws, ultimately, through concepts). In the second and third parts of that chapter, “reason” refers rather to the various efforts of individuals to exercise their supposed rational autonomy (that is, their ability to find or figure out for themselves how to live). In the first part, it is the purpose (or “teleology”) of nature that is in question; in the second and third parts, it is the purpose of individual life that is the problem. As we move on to “Spirit” and then “Religion,” it is the purpose of life in general that becomes the issue. Stylistic appearances aside, Hegel’s question throughout these chapters is essentially a Socratic question—*how to live the good life*. That search, in a word, is *reason* (as in, “reason for living.”)

The four ingredients in this assortment of considerations called “ethics” might all be considered part of Hegel’s increasing interest in history and the philosophy of history, but it is not essential to list them historically as such. They are,

Aristotle and the Greek *polis*.

Jesus and the Spirit of Christianity.

The French Revolution and the Enlightenment.

Kant’s concept of morality (and Fichte’s derivations from it.)

Aristotle and the Greek Polis

We have linked together Hegel and Aristotle in other connections too—in terms of their teleological conception of nature and the overall picture of the cosmos as the self-realization of what Hegel (not Aristotle) calls “Spirit.” But the linkage is nowhere more profound or revealing than in the realm of “ethics.” Indeed, one might split the whole history of ethics into two camps—one of which is exemplified by Aristotle and his *Nicomachean Ethics*¹¹—the other represented by

11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics (Ethics)*, trans W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

Kant and his *Critique of Practical Reason*. (Nietzsche divided the whole of the “genealogy” of morals into just this contrast, and called the two camps “master morality” and “slave morality,” respectively.) In Aristotle’s *Ethics*, which is essentially a report of the consensus of his fellows on the mores and morals of the times, individual interest and community interest are always identical and the key to moral goodness is the concept of *excellence*. The “good life,” he tells us, is the life of activity in accordance with reason, which is called *virtue*.¹² In Kant’s morality of practical reason, on the other hand, the key term is *duty*, and the central concept is *autonomy*, which is precisely to say that morality is *not* synonymous or even co-extensive with community interests or, for that matter, with self-interest either.¹³ The categorical imperatives that constitute Kant’s moral laws are for the most part *negative* commandments (“thou shalt not . . .”), and the good man is one who *abstains* from wrong actions as well as performs his duties. One might say, simply, that the difference here is a matter of emphasis, but, except in some very extreme cases, ethics is a question of emphasis. The emphasis in Aristotle is all on activity and excellence, membership in the community with *honor* among one’s fellows as a key virtue. The emphasis in Kant is all on duty and obeying the rules as an individual, regardless of the consequences and divorced from any sense of community. Indeed, the good man for Kant would not be Aristotle’s jolly warrior-statesman but the local grocer or bank clerk who does not cheat his customers, who does not lie, or steal, or kill. (Nietzsche: “so it is that the good man is the emasculated man, the man who has no desires.”¹⁴)

Hegel’s ethics, from his very first essay on “folk religion” in 1793 (and even before that, according to Harris¹⁵) to the *Philosophy of Right* and the lectures on “Objective Spirit” in the 1820s, looks back to the communal sense of belonging of Aristotle’s *polis* and contrasts it with the “alienated” individualism of the modern state. (In the *Phenomenology*, and indeed in his early studies, he tends to identify this sense of “alienation” with large states in general, and he locates its first historical manifestation in the abstract law-bound character of the Roman Empire (477–83).) The emphasis is on activity and self-realization (which always means, within and for the benefit of community) instead of Kantian duty and moral principles. It is in this light that the odd and misleading progression from individual attempts at the good

12. Aristotle, *Ethics*. Books I and II, esp. Book II, chs. 5–7.

13. *FMM*, pp. 393–97.

14. *Antichrist*, (trans. Kaufmann, *Viking Portable Nietzsche*, 1954) ¶47.

15. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, p. 76.

life in chapter 5 ("Reason") to the primitive family and community life that commences chapter 6 ("Spirit") can be explained: all of the sophistication of Kant's morality, as the high point of a long tradition of ethics, is still inferior to the most primitive sense of belonging.

Jesus and the Spirit of Christianity

Hegel's concern with the personality of Jesus and the spirit of Christianity, of course, is his most enduring interest, if not the key to his entire philosophy.¹⁶ We have already dealt with the spirit of Christianity in a negative way, however, in "the Unhappy Consciousness" in chapter 4, but there is more to come, in chapter 7 ("Religion") naturally, but also, I will argue, in chapter 6, where the moral personality of Jesus appears as "the beautiful soul" at the very end of that chapter. In his first writings, both Jesus and Christianity were compared most unfavorably with Greek ethics and folk-religion. Later on, Hegel tried to integrate Jesus' message and Kant's morality (in the "Life of Jesus" in 1795) and, finally, at the turn of the century, he tried to resurrect what he considered to be the "Spirit" of Christianity in a short-lived theory of "love," then in philosophy, beginning with "Faith and Knowledge" in 1803. The "ethics" in the *Phenomenology* makes little mention of Jesus; indeed everything there is compatible with an atheistic world-outlook, despite the belligerent middle section on "Enlightenment," in which all of Hegel's old arguments and prejudices surface once again, contrasting the cold secular reason of the *Aufklärung* with the spiritualism of religion, much to the former's disadvantage. If Christianity plays a role in Hegel's ethics at all, it is only at the very end, where the historical Jesus is brought in as a transition figure to the discussion of "Religion" in general. And yet, it is always there, as the backdrop of the discussion.

The French Revolution and the Enlightenment

The French Revolution, of course, was *the* traumatic event of Hegel's political youth. The revolution began as Hegel started college at the Tübingen *Stift*, and "the Terror" was at its height when Hegel graduated. For any sensitive thinker of the times, the revolution was the issue; what did it mean? Was the conclusion, as Metternich and the other reactionaries of post-Napoleonic era argued, that liberalism and individual liberties were dangerous and to be suppressed? Or did it

16. See Harris, p. 267ff., and of course the traditional British Hegelians, particularly McTaggart (*Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*) and Sterling (*The Secret of Hegel*).

mean, as Schiller had argued, that the French as a people were not yet morally advanced enough to be able to handle the awesome responsibilities of freedom? Were terror and anarchy an inevitable stage in any revolution? And was it only a stage—or was it the essence of revolution as such? And if one were to look at the Enlightenment and French Revolution as the culmination of the spirit of individual moral autonomy and the search for secular happiness (or what Hegel sometimes calls “*eudaimonism*”¹⁷), then the question takes on direct relevance to Hegel’s concept of *Sittlichkeit*. Does the notion of individual autonomy and the search for happiness even make sense apart from a harmonious, established, and durable social order? Can one, in the name of individual liberty, destroy society without destroying liberty and morality too? For Hegel, the French Revolution was the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Enlightenment, the bloody demonstration of what can happen when the philosophical concepts of “freedom” and “rational autonomy” are misunderstood.

Kant’s Concept of Morality

Kant’s morality, of course, provided the thematic core of Hegel’s early writings—at least that central Kantian premise of practical reason, in Hegel’s words: “the aim and essence of all true religion, . . . is human morality.”¹⁸ But Hegel’s knowledge and interest in Kant’s philosophy were skimpy, at best, and until the late 1790s, he seemed comfortable only with Kant’s theory of religion. In 1798, however, he undertook a detailed study and commentary on Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* and it is evident that, by the time he started writing the *Phenomenology*, he understood and had radically departed from Kantian ethics. In his earliest writings, Hegel seemed to assume that Kant, Jesus, and the Greek *polis* were all expressions of a single ideal. By the essay on “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” in 1799 he had obviously turned against Kant’s notion of morality in favor of his own concept of *Sittlichkeit*. He rejected in particular the bloodlessly formal structure of Kant’s theory, in which *principles* (“laws”) alone formed the basis of morality, apart from any public or communal concerns and apart from the interpersonal interactions which gave these principles their moral

17. He uses the word mainly in “Faith and Knowledge” to criticize Enlightenment secularism and the search for purely worldly happiness. The term comes from the Greek *eudaimonia* and was famously used by Aristotle; it is loosely translated “happiness,” but better as “doing well.” However, it is not Aristotle’s concept that Hegel is employing here.

18. Positivity-essay, *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 58.

significance. The contrast, again, is with Aristotle, who makes it quite clear from the beginning of his *Ethics* that the key to moral virtue is a good upbringing in a good family and that the virtues are of no significance whatsoever to someone who is not already a part of that community. In the chapter on "Individuality," Hegel repeats his primary objections to Kant's formalism, in particular, the charge that formal principles do not provide us with any concrete guides to action. In the section on "Morality" that ends chapter 6, on the other hand, he attacks Kant's over-all view of religion and its connection to morality (as "a postulate of practical reason"), thus reversing the stand which he assumed in his earlier writings of the 1790s.

In what follows, I have tried to follow Hegel's order as much as possible. The discussion covers the last two-thirds of chapter 5 on "Reason" and the whole of chapter 6. I have also brought in comparisons and contrasts from Hegel's later philosophy of history and political philosophy (in particular the *Philosophy of Right* of 1820) but I do not mean to imply at any point that the *Phenomenology* (or these sections of it) is to be construed as a miniature philosophy of history or "philosophy of right." Indeed, what is remarkable is that these two topics, which were so important to Hegel even in 1806, should not have found greater expression in the *Phenomenology*.

a. The Meaning of Life and the Search for Spirit: A Synopsis

To begin with, this Reason is aware of itself merely as an individual and as such must demand and produce its reality in an 'other'. Then, however, its consciousness having raised itself into universality, it becomes *universal* Reason, and recognized in and for itself, which in its pure consciousness unites all self-consciousnesses. It is the simple, spiritual essence which, in attaining consciousness, is at the same time *real Substance*, into which the earlier forms return as their ground . . . —*Phenomenology* (348)

Given the complexity of the work to follow, perhaps it would be best to begin with a simple summary and synopsis of the some 200 pages that constitute Hegel's ethics. First, the summary:

Hegel's conception of ethics, like Aristotle's and like Rousseau's, consists of a single all-embracing concept of community or *polis*, in which every citizen lives "in and with and for one's people".¹⁹ The

19. "Natural Law" essay, p. 100.

antithesis of this conception of ethics is modern Christian "bourgeois" ethics, in which public and private life are firmly distinguished, in which personal virtue and community values are distinct if not sometimes opposed, in which individual interests and the interests of others are assumed from the outset to be in a state of perpetual antagonism, to be reconciled by the State, whose primary function is to enforce contracts and keep peace among its constituents²⁰. In Aristotle, the subject matter of ethics was indistinguishable from the subject matter of *politeuein*, and in Rousseau too, civil society was itself envisioned as the school in which individual culture and virtue could be cultivated. Indeed, Rousseau had complained, in *The Social Contract*, that such words as "citizen" had lost so much of their meaning in modern society that they should be extinguished from the (French) language.²¹ Part of Hegel's metaphysical rejection of the concept of "soul" was his insistence on the fact that there is no "self" in any sense before interpersonal interaction, and it would not be inaccurate to view the entire *Phenomenology* as a plea for unity, in which the particular is always defined in terms of the universal, in which individual identity—virtue, happiness, and meaning—is always a function of the over-all community in which persons are citizens.²²

The strategy of these chapters, therefore, is to show that every variety of individual pleasure and virtue, even including the individual recognition of the universal principles of Kantian morality, and every concept of society and culture that continues to look at the individual as its essence, is self-defeating if not—usually in some *practical* sense—contradictory (357–59). Thus despite the variety of ethical, historical, and quasi-religious issues raised here, the over-all argument is remarkably single-minded: to show that individuality in every way presupposes an ethical order, and that ethical order, or "Spirit," is indispensable (350–55). Individuals, on the other hand, are quite dispensable, and so (given certain debatable arguments that Hegel had held since his earliest essays) individual virtue and happiness cannot be the meaning of life or the true meaning of "Spirit" (350), whatever our personal outlook on these matters. The synopsis:

First, Hegel quickly makes his main point—that individual exis-

20. See, e.g., R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), who argues an extreme version of this minimal conception of the state on the basis of alleged "natural rights of individuals"; this "rights" view has been used to defend a wide spectrum of political views, from anarchism to liberalism to some forms of authoritarianism, but for Hegel, "rights" are derived *from* the state and not prior to it.

21. For a good discussion, see Roger Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 54.

22. Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978).

tence is significant only within the context of *Sittlichkeit*, an organized social unity (349–54). But having said this so quickly, he then proceeds to consider various ethical theories, and in particular those which ignore this basic point and pretend—to their detriment—that the search for the good life is strictly an individual matter. His argument against them is that any breach in the social fabric is ultimately self-destructive, even if, as in Kant, this breach is itself in the name of universal morality. Then, making the shift to *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel considers a breach in the social fabric of a different kind, or what he calls “alienation” (*Entfremdung*). These schizoid ethical theories may also involve individualism but, more generally, they involve an essential rupture in the very conception of society as such.

The arguments against individualism and “individuality” begin, naturally enough, with that most common of sophomoric philosophies, hedonism or the life of pleasure. The arguments are largely borrowed from Plato and Aristotle and authors of modern times: the conclusion (as in the master side of “Master and Slave”) is that the search for pure pleasure becomes jaded and insatiable, and one soon becomes the slave of one’s desires instead of the master of one’s fate. The rejection of hedonism quite “naturally” turns to an attitude of self-righteous self-denial, not the extreme denial of asceticism (as in “Unhappy Consciousness”) but the identifiably romantic sense of “inner goodness” that one finds in Rousseau, in *Emile* and, more clearly and perversely, in Rousseau’s *Confessions*.²³ But such “inner goodness” finds it hard to adjust itself to the temptations of the ways of the world, and so, as in Rousseau’s *Confessions*, this inner virtue finds itself wholly cut off from the world but at the same time caught up in its vices. This gives rise to a sense of impotence and not infrequent hypocrisy, and the reason—so evident in Rousseau—is the refusal of this supposedly “rational” individual to recognize himself or herself as an intrinsic part of a community, in which pleasures are not merely individual and virtue not an “inner” state but an outward set of social activities. It remains strictly on the level of the individual personality and its needs and supposed virtues, but fails to see beyond itself to the social source of these needs and virtues.

The next alternative view, therefore, is a turn to what would appear to be a social context within which pleasures and virtues are socially derived and socially directed, but the context is bogus and the “society” in fact no society at all, rather more of a zoo, filled with individual “animals” each in their separate cages and with no community

23. Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. John M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1954).

"spirit" whatsoever. But it is community spirit that makes a community, not a mere collection of individuals. It is not difficult to recognize here Hegel's borrowing from Rousseau once again, this time in a critical mode, and the "zoo" is in fact *bourgeois society*. The French, Rousseau had complained, "mistake a town for a City and a bourgeois for a citizen."²⁴ Findlay offers up the amusing analog of an academic community here,²⁵ but what is this but the most blatant example of the bourgeois community of feigned fraternity and internecine rivalry, in which interpersonal antagonisms are thinly masked behind a veneer of shared standards and interests? The zoo appears to be a social entity, but in fact it is not this at all. It is unabashed individuality, modified only by the fact that it recognizes, at least, the pseudo-social interpersonal context which that individuality needs to function.

Instead of taking the turn to social life and ethics proper at this point, Hegel remains faithful to the historical-philosophical development he would have known best—namely, from Rousseau and bourgeois society to Rousseau's foremost German admirer, Kant. It was well known that Kant praised Rousseau's contributions to ethics above all else and even compared Rousseau's moral theories to Newton's theories in physics.²⁶ Where Rousseau had used a "synthetic" method of understanding the origin of morals (that is, through his fiction of the "state of nature" and man's "natural inner goodness"), Kant would use an "analytic" method to understand the nature of moral goodness as such. But the "inner" metaphor would remain wholly intact, except that, where Rousseau considered this "inner virtue" to be a property of every individual (especially himself), Kant viewed the same source of virtue as rational autonomy—the faculty of practical reason. In terms of Hegel's over-all strategy, moving away from the particular toward the universal, Kant's derivations from Rousseau have one decided advantage: the products of practical reason are universal principles, valid not only for the individual who formulates them in any particular instance but rather "for all rational creatures." It is this universality that puts Kant on the brink of the realization of "Spirit," but his insistence on individual autonomy keeps him away from it.

Now is the time for the social turn, the turn from Kant's morality to *Sittlichkeit* or "ethics," the turn from individuality "in and for itself" to "Spirit." Chapter 6 ("Spirit") begins again with Rousseau, but Fichte's ethics are also much in evidence here, and the presentation is com-

24. Rousseau, *Social Contract* trans. Charles Sherover (New York: New American Library, 1974).

25. Findlay, *Hegel* p. 111.

26. Quoted by Cassirer in *Goethe, Kant, Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970).

parable in its content to Hegel's own *System of Ethical Life* of 1802–3.²⁷ It begins, as Rousseau's *Social Contract* begins, with the recognition that "the most ancient of all societies, and the only one that is natural, is the family."²⁸ In his early *System*, Hegel introduces the notion of sex and the family as the "supreme organic polarity" and "the supreme unity," with the parents functioning as "the universal" which cancels the "external negativity of the child."²⁹ This thorny language is reiterated in the *Phenomenology* but as "the simple and immediate essence of the ethical sphere; as *actual* universality . . . a force actively opposed to individual being-for-self" (449). "The Family", Hegel tells us, is "the *unconscious*, still inner concept, . . . the element of a people's³⁰ actual existence, the *immediate* being of *Sittlichkeit*" (450). But the family, for Hegel as for Rousseau, is not yet society as such, and the road to community is not merely a matter of expansion from small groups to larger tribes to states, as Rousseau seemed to suggest in his second *Discourse* (*On the Origins of Inequality*).³¹ Though the family is the "element" of a people (nation), that is no guarantee that their relationship will be harmonious or mutually supportive. Indeed, the origin of modern society, Hegel tells us, lies in the tragic *conflict* between family and community, just as the origin of personhood is in the conflict of master and slave. Hegel's example here is Antigone, who is torn between "the Divine Law" of family unity and the "Human Law" of society and social obedience. The direction of movement, here as always in these chapters, is toward greater generality, in which the family becomes absorbed (but by no means eliminated) in the larger community and, finally, in the first enormous ancient state—the Roman Empire, in which personal relationships and "immediate unity" are necessarily replaced by the impersonality of universal laws.³²

This transition from immediate family to the prototype of the modern bureaucratic state is part history, part fiction, but mainly, it is a conceptual juxtaposition of various concepts of "Spirit." Hegel is not here claiming the historical truth of *Antigone*, any more than he would have claimed historical accuracy for his "Master-Slave" parable or

27. *System of Ethical Life*, trans. Harris and Knox, pp. 99–179.

28. *Social Contract*, p. 1.

29. *System*, pp. 110–11.

30. "Volk," which Miller translates as "nation."

31. Cf. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, ¶181: "the family disintegrates . . . into a plurality of families."

32. It is important to stress that it is the enormous *state* that is crucial here, the attempt to integrate a variety of nationalities and peoples under a single set of laws. Thus Alexander's empire and the vast holdings of the ancient Persians, for example, would not count as "states," even despite Alexander's attempts to spread Greek *culture* wherever he went.

Rousseau would have insisted that his "state of nature" was anything more than imaginative fiction. ("First, let's ignore the facts," he famously suggested.)³³ Presumably there was some such progression from "primitive" family and tribal life to the bureaucratic state, and so it must not be thought that the transitions here are entirely non-historical. Here we meet with the central principle of Hegel's philosophy of history, which would not be published until years later as the introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*; that principle is that "Reason governs the world and has consequently governed history".³⁴ But Hegel also promises us there that "to him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back,"³⁵ which is to say that the philosophical approach to history, for Hegel, is a particularly selective and interpretative process. What is essential is not the infinite array of contingent details that make up what he gruesomely calls "the slaughter-bench of history"³⁶ but the pattern of divine self-realization those details follow.³⁷ In the later *Lectures*, this pattern is the emergence of universal freedom, but here in the *Phenomenology* it might better be described as the emergence of universal Spirit (though it is sometimes apparent that these are more or less the same).³⁸ The "reason" that Hegel finds in the quasi-history of the "Spirit" section of the *Phenomenology* is, in other words, the realization of Spirit itself, the increasing movement from merely implicit unity in the "primitive" family or tribe to the fully explicit concept of legal citizenship in the Roman Republic. It is worth noting, however, that Hegel's own ideal community—the *polis*—does not appear in this progression, an odd fact indeed for anyone who wishes to see this chapter as Hegel's philosophy of history as such. And what follows is an even more glaring omission—the entire "middle ages" from the decline and fall of the Roman Empire to the German Reformation at the turn of the 16th Century. One might argue that medieval Christianity has already been covered in the "Unhappy Consciousness," but the omission of Athens at the height of its development should show once and for all that this is in no literal sense history for Hegel, but rather a progression of conceptual forms which as a matter of fact have had

33. At the beginning of his second *Discourse*.

34. The introduction is translated as "*Reason in History*" by Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), p. 34.

35. *Ibid.* 13.

36. *Ibid.* 27.

37. On page 18 he suggests that his project might accordingly be viewed as a "theodicy"—a tracing of the ways of God in the world.

38. Cf. *Philosophy of Right*, 105: "Ethical life is the Idea of Freedom in that on the one hand it is the good come alive . . . Thus ethical life is the concept of freedom developed into the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness."

distinctive historical manifestations. That progression of forms in this instance concerns a single concept—the antithesis (but also the presupposition) of the realization of spiritual unity—namely, what Hegel calls “alienation” (*entfremdung*). Greece is left out of the picture for a simple reason—it was not, in Hegel’s vision of the *polis*, alienated. The medieval period is left out too because (in Hegel’s biased opinion) it was not enough of a social and spiritual entity to deserve being called “alienated.” This is, of course, historical nonsense, but Hegel’s systematic distortion and exclusion of the medieval period was both in line with his Enlightenment prejudices and in keeping with his general disdain of the “Gothic” thinking of the Romantic poets and critics who surrounded him. Hegel, like most of his contemporaries, (and this was true until very recently) tended to view the Christian history of the West from (approximately) 500 A.D. to the Reformation in 1507 as something of a wholly static, largely brutal period defined with only inessential variations by the themes of faith, feudalism, and unenlightened despotism.

With the modern period, however, comes a new concept—the concept of *Bildung* or “culture.” Hegel is here again reflecting the dominant prejudice of the Enlightenment, that “progress” begins only with the modern era,³⁹ but his view of “*Bildung*” here is hardly unqualified celebration: he sees “culture” as instrumental to “alienation” and the opposition of “culture” and religion as ultimately detrimental. This was, we remember, the central lament of Hegel’s earlier essay, “Faith and Knowledge” too, and his criticisms of the Enlightenment are once again repeated here. The fact that Hegel himself was mainly a product of that same movement should not deter us from appreciating the depth of his objections—which largely are objections to the calculating utilitarianism of that movement, as if one could *construct* the ideal community from a mere philosophical blueprint.⁴⁰ He does recognize what he calls “the truth of Enlightenment,” however more modest this may be than the pictures of “paradise on earth” which had been

39. This view has been challenged by Robert Nisbet in his *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), in which he suggests the notion of progress is already firmly entrenched in the great medieval philosophers, and in particular, Augustine.

40. The idea that a thinker wholly immersed in a way of thinking might also be a harsh critic of that same way of thinking surprisingly surprises some scholars, especially when discussing Hegel. But in a world in which intellectuals are constantly demeaning (in brilliant discourses) their own intellectual presumptions, I cannot imagine why this would surprise anyone or strike one as the least bit inconsistent. Hegel was a thoroughly “enlightened” thinker, and as such was one of Enlightenment’s harshest critics—from the inside.

promised by some of the French philosophers.⁴¹ The end of Enlightenment, in case we needed to be reminded, is not yet paradise on earth but sheer terror, and here Hegel makes one of the few strictly historical moves in the *Phenomenology*: from Enlightenment to the French Revolution and the Terror of 1792–95. But, of course, the historical move displays a conceptual point too—that freedom, when “absolute,” turns out not to be freedom at all. Or more to the point of the over-all strategy, individual liberties defended at the cost of the social order in general are utterly impossible, but absolute freedom exercised at the cost of so many individual lives is intolerable. Freedom presupposes, it cannot be opposed to, a stable society.

Where would one go from here? If it were history, there could be no doubt—to Napoleon and the internationalization of the Revolution. If it were politics or a proto-*Philosophy of Right*, we would have to move on to a renewed social contract or the establishment of a constitutional state. What we find is neither of these, nor any vague semblance of them; what we find is a return to Kant and his theories of practical reason. In other words, from the French Revolution and the Terror we move not forward in history but sideways into Germany, where the only revolution outside the student Jacobin clubs was Kant’s “Copernican Revolution.” But the discussion of Kant here is not at all revolutionary; it is rather Kant’s argument for the harmony of virtue and happiness—justice in doing one’s duty, or what he called *the Summum Bonum*.⁴² In more religious terms, philosophers have often raised the so-called “problem of evil”—in other words, how is it possible that there be a God who guarantees justice in the world but at the same time allows there to be unjust suffering and evil? For the purposes of Kant’s morality, the problem is rather more of a formal paradox: how is it possible for the good person to act “for the sake of duty alone” if he or she cannot be assured at the same time of not putting oneself at a disadvantage by doing so? The traditional answer to both questions is the invocation of the rewards and punishments of the afterlife. This is an answer which Hegel rejects entirely. In the deliberations which follow, Hegel also rejects the various replies that one finds of a more secular and less religious persuasion, including

41. Condorcet: “Our hopes for the future condition of the human race can be subsumed under three important heads: the abolition of inequality between nations, the progress of equality within each nation, and the true perfection of mankind” (*Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, in Gardiner (ed.), *Philosophies of History*. New York: Free Press, 1969).

42. Kant’s discussion is in Book II of the second *Critique*, also in his *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*; the word thus used applies to this particular doctrine, not just “the highest good.” See the present Chapter, 9d.

the somewhat opaque mystifications of Fichte and, most importantly, the moral personality of Jesus himself, not as the Son or the Incarnation of God, but as a moral example, the example that is to be found, not in Hegel's laughably Kantian "Life of Jesus" but in the actual text of the "Sermon on the Mount."

It takes little critical facility to realize that this third section of chapter 6 is perversely placed. It is indeed part of the story of "alienation," which is the conceptual theme of the preceding section, but it has little thematic plausibility in any other sense and would fit much better in the following chapter on "Religion." (That is where we shall deal with much of it.) But one should also keep note of the fact that the organization of this whole last third of the *Phenomenology* (that is, the whole of Part C on "Reason") is horrendously disorganized and, as Hegel himself admitted to Schelling, "disproportionate." It is here that the historicist Hegel fully discovers himself, much to the chagrin of the absolute idealist Hegel who began the work, several hundred pages ago.

b. Morality and the Good Life

Man does not live for pleasure; only the Englishman does. —Nietzsche

HEDONISM ("Pleasure and Necessity," 5, B, a.)

The search for the good life begins, almost inevitably it seems, with *hedonism*, the view that it is *pleasure* that makes life worthwhile. In America in particular, it is difficult to think of the good life without thinking about the things that make life pleasurable—good food and wine, enjoyable activities, success and money, sex and companionship. Pushed into the background are the less tangible rewards of hard work for its own sake, the difficult dialectics of a relationship (as opposed to the casual pleasures of companionship and the erotic pleasures of romantic love), questions of duty and morality and the obligations of citizenship. We tend to see these more as a network of necessities which on the one hand secure the possibility of the good life but on the other hand interfere with it too. The good life is pleasure, and as much of it as possible.

Hedonism is among the oldest of ethical theories; Plato had to deal

with it, and Aristotle dedicated several separate sections to discussing it in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴³ But in its more developed forms, it is a distinctively modern view, and it has earned a special name: *utilitarianism*. Whatever its larger scope as a moral theory, the premise of utilitarianism is quite simply that the good is what gives us pleasure, and the bad is what gives us pain. The debate has been particularly vigorous since the mid-19th century, when John Stuart Mill established utilitarianism as one of the leading moral theories—if not *the* moral view of our times. In Mill as in Bentham before him, “the utility principle”—that only pleasure is good in itself—became the axiom of his ethics.⁴⁴ This provoked questions still unsettled: Are there also differences in the “quality” of pleasures? Is the ecstasy of a single sadist to count as much as the misery of his victims? Can utilitarianism form an adequate theory of justice or moral obligation? But however these questions are answered, the premise seems to remain intact, almost unchallengeable; pleasure is the good, pain is the bad, and the good life is the maximization of the first and the minimalization of the second.

In the *Phenomenology*, hedonism appears virtually out of nowhere—that is—right after Hegel's discussion of phrenology and the mind-body (spirit-skull) problem. This means, on the one hand, that hedonism is one of those “certainty” starting points—like “Sense-Certainty” and “Self-Certainty”—that might just as well serve as the starting point of the dialectic, as a most obvious view, as the normal starting point of any discussion of ethics, whether in a freshman philosophy class or a distinguished treatise on the subject. (“Why should one ever act contrary to his or her own pleasures?”) If we ignore the intervening chapter on “Observing Reason,” however, we can also see hedonism as a not unfamiliar *reaction* against the rigors of an “unhappy self-consciousness,” notoriously Kierkegaard's gloomy religious life of guilt and abstinence. The contrast between unhappy piety and “losing oneself” in the pleasures of life is by no means Hegel's invention, and the whole history of Christianity might be framed at the extremes by these two opposed forms of consciousness, wholly self-absorbed self-consciousness of one's own inadequacy vis-à-vis eternity, on the one side, and the sensuous immediacy of the moment, on the other. If we include the section on “Observing Reason,” we can, though less forcefully, appreciate another quite “natural” reac-

43. Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book I.5; II.3; VII.11; X.1–5.

44. Jeremy Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) and Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1863).

tion—the dedicated scientist or scholar, wholly absorbed in his or her work and its rigors, breaking away for an evening or a week of sheer hedonism. John Stuart Mill again comes to mind, but it is not an unknown polarity in contemporary academic life.

In terms of its basic conceptual structure, the hedonistic form of consciousness has as its most essential attribute the fact that it is strictly individual in its ontology: pleasure is a property of the individual (as is pain), and whether one is concerned only with one's own pleasures or, in good utilitarian form, with the pleasures of the greatest number of people possible, the locus of the theory remains the individual consciousness. One might talk sensibly of the laws or morals of a people without any reference to particular individuals (one can imagine without difficulty a society in which *the Law* is known only by a small judicial elite, or perhaps a single "infallible" authority), but one cannot intelligibly imagine a reference to "the pleasures of the people" without it being clearly understood that it is each individual person whose pleasure and pain is to be taken into account.⁴⁵

Given Hegel's over-all strategy of moving from the particular to the universal and showing how what *looks* like an elemental particular is in fact but a node in a complex nexus, we can anticipate Hegel's argument against hedonism. Considered as a purely particular property of an individual, pleasure lacks the universality that is intrinsic to the very idea of "reason" or "purposive activity." That is, it cannot provide a sense of "meaning" to life, but, at most, it is a meaningless distraction—however enjoyable. Behind these abstractions, we recognize once again a wholly familiar phenomenon—the fact that the life of pleasure never seems to "amount to anything," that pleasures repeated soon become tedious, and soon we, like the "master" in the "Master-Slave" parable, become *jaded*. Pleasures are no longer pleasurable, or even a distraction. This, in Hegel's ontological jargon, is precisely because they are particulars, because they have no "meaning." They refer to nothing else and add up to nothing. Even the greatest pleasure endures but for a moment, and then it is gone, leaving us at best pleasantly devoid of desire, or worse, and just as often, bloated, exhausted, restless, disgusted, or depressed. Thus even if we accept (for the moment) the view that it is the individual who is the locus of a meaningful life, mere pleasure is not sufficient to make life meaningful. Pleasure, alone, is nothing at all.

The argument here, looking ahead, could come (and later does

45. Thus in classical utilitarianism, the "utility principle" is linked to an "equality principle," "that each person counts for one and only one" (Mill, *Utilitarianism*).

come) straight out of Kierkegaard. The "aesthetic life," the life of Don Juan, for example, is one of "pure immediacy," lived for the moment and oblivious to eternity.⁴⁶ One can, as Don Juan, continue in such a life indefinitely, until, that is, one begins to reflect, to move beyond the moment and the immediate. At that point, gloats Kierkegaard, the pleasure is no more; Don Juan's lot is pure *despair*. Thus it is that even Don Juan is eventually driven to move on to a more "ethical" form of life, a life concerned with virtue and other people, not merely as means to pleasure but, as in Kant, as ends in themselves.⁴⁷ Looking back, however, one finds the same argument in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics*; pleasure, in itself, is nothing. Aristotle, for example, insists that the good life and pleasure are inseparable, but not because pleasure is the good life; rather pleasure is "bound up with the activity it completes . . . the pleasure intensifies the activity."⁴⁸ But this presupposes that the activity itself is good and worthwhile, for the pleasure in itself is of no intrinsic value at all. Pleasure accompanying an improper activity is improper pleasure; there is nothing good about it. Indeed, the pursuit of pleasure alone Aristotle considers an unintelligible pursuit; pleasure "completes" our activities, but it is not by itself an intelligible goal. If eating produces pleasure, it is because we enjoy eating. If sex produces pleasure, it is because we enjoy a certain activity with (or without) another person. If reading gives us pleasure, it is because we enjoy reading. But, in every case—even the purest examples of hedonism—it is not pleasure alone that we seek, but something else. One might think that drug-induced pleasures, at least, are pure pleasures, or that those peculiar sensations induced by the psychophysicologist James Olds by stimulating certain "pleasure centers" of the brain might count as pleasure "in itself." But even here, Hegel would argue, either the pleasure has significance because it occurs in a larger context (for example, in a drug culture, in which such experiences are praised and encouraged) or else, sensations aside, it is nothing at all. Even in Epicurus, supposedly the classic defender of hedonism, we find the following most anti-Epicurean proviso;

The pleasant life is not the product of one drinking party after another or of sexual intercourse with women or boys or of the sea food and other delicacies afforded by a luxurious table. On the contrary, it is the result of sober thinking—namely, investigation of the reasons for every act of choice and aversion, and elimination of those

46. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, esp. his discussion of *Don Giovanni* and "Diary of a Seducer" in vol. 1, pp. 297–440.

47. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 170f.

48. Aristotle, *Ethics* Book X, chs. 4–5.

false ideas about the gods and death which are the chief source of mental disturbances.⁴⁹

It is from Aristotle that Hegel inherits the argument that pleasure, which looks like an immediate particular, is in fact an abstract and mediated universal. Stated as such, this seems confusing, but the argument is that virtually no pleasures are simply sensations pleasant in themselves; it is always the context and the activity they accompany that makes them so. A bite on one's shoulder may be extremely pleasurable in the midst of a passionate embrace, but painful and disgusting when similarly administered by a stranger on the subway. Even sexual orgasm, in certain (admittedly rare) instances, might not be pleasurable at all, and the same taste of raspberry sherbert that was so pleasurable with the first spoonful may well be repulsive by the end of a half-gallon carton. Pleasure, like the sensations of sense-certainty, are not particulars and immediate but rather interpretations, mediated by context and concepts.

The preceding set of arguments embodies a now familiar Hegelian twist—his perverse delight in attacking a seemingly unassailable and certain position from both ends at once: on the one hand, pleasure fails to provide meaning because it is a particular and not a universal; on the other hand, pleasure turns out not to be a particular after all, but rather an abstract and mediated complex which is bound and defined by its context. But this is not as such an argument against hedonism; an articulate hedonist could still insist that, whether pleasure is a particular or a universal is surely of no concern to him, and if pleasure turns out to be an accompaniment of activities instead of an end in itself, that does not in any sense preclude his continuing to live the life of pleasure—even a life of jaded dissipation. It is Hegel, not the hedonist, who impresses upon us the importance of duration. Frankly, the pleasure-seeker is not impressed.

In a few paragraphs, in his ontological prose, Hegel seems to suggest no fewer than a half-dozen arguments against the hedonist. By the dictates of his own method, the only arguments that will work will have to be *internal* arguments, that is, arguments which will show the hedonist (or someone attracted to hedonism as a view of the good life) that the very pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating. With this in mind, however, perhaps we should first mention an argument that Hegel does *not* employ here but which has often been attributed to him (e.g. by Findlay).⁵⁰ This is the argument that hedonism—and

49. Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*, in *The Philosophy of Epicurus*, trans. G. Strodach (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1963).

50. Findlay, *Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 108.

egoism more generally—is self-defeating because it cannot be generalized, since several hedonists inevitably conflict with one another. (The assumption is that hedonists are egoists and that pleasure is limited.) However old and honored this argument may be, it is valid only if the hedonist (egoist) is *also* either a utilitarian who believes that other people's pleasures are his concern or a quasi-Kantian who feels strangely compelled to urge hedonism (egoism) on others even if it interferes with his own pursuits. A hedonist may well wish everyone else well, of course, but it seems to me to be philosophical obstinacy to argue that, if the hedonist is indeed a hedonist, he must also defend a *principle* to that effect.⁵¹ This is *not* Hegel's argument. He approaches it only where he points out (355) that the hedonist is inevitably "isolated and on his own" and "in opposition to the laws and customs," but this is an anticipation of "alienation," not a Hobbesian warning of a war of "all against all."

If the hedonist (or someone attracted to hedonism as a theory) is to be put off, it is necessary to demonstrate that hedonism in itself is impossible or self-defeating, not just that it has untoward consequences (for others) or breaks down the social order. Of course, if one person's hedonism could in fact tear down the social order, to the extent that no one could obtain any pleasure at all, that *might* be an argument for a relatively reasonable hedonist, but one can always imagine a Caligula, or a less personable David Hume, who would prefer the destruction of the world to the slightest personal pain or deprivation of the slightest pleasure.⁵² Parents know how hopeless such abstract and implausible arguments are in dissuading a teenage son or daughter from hedonistic tendencies; the only workable appeal to the hedonist—is to hedonism.

One argument, again only briefly suggested (362), harks back to the master-slave relationship, in the sense that hedonism confuses in a disastrous way the other person as an "independent self-consciousness" and the other person as a mere *means*. When Hegel speaks of "the vision of unity of the two independent self-consciousnesses," it is not far-fetched or a matter of scholarly licentiousness to suggest that he is talking about sex. The argument here—often made against Don Juan—is simply that, in *using* another person for one's own pleasure, one denies them their independence as a person; but if what one seeks is not sheer sensual pleasure alone but

51. See, e.g. Brian Medlin, "Ultimate Principles and Ethical Egoism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 35 (1957).

52. The comment is from Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*. "It is not contrary to Reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (II.iii.3.p. 416) (Selby-Bigge, ed. Oxford 1906).

rather—what I would think would almost always be the case—some interpersonal expression of unity as well, then the pursuit of pleasure narrowly defined directly contradicts the pursuit of a sense of unity that is far more pleasurable. Or to put the argument in a more Aristotelean way, it is the pursuit of unity that is pleasurable, and not pleasure itself that is pursued.

Another argument, suggested in the same passage (362), is again familiar in various discussions of Don Juan. Albert Camus, for example, in his discussion of Don Juan as “the absurd hero” in his *Myth of Sisyphus*, tells us yet once again that what Don Juan wants is not *this* woman and *that* woman but *Woman* as such, and Hegel here tells us, less chauvinistically but more obscurely too, that “it is not as *this particular* individual that it becomes an object to itself, but rather as the unity of itself and the other self-consciousness” (362); furthermore, the “transition is made from the form of the *one* or unit into that of *universality* . . . (364). In short, what the hedonist really wants is *Pleasure*, not just this or that pleasure, and here Aristotle’s argument that pleasure cannot be a goal in itself but rather accompanies and “completes” good activity comes down on the hedonist full force, not as an abstract ontological consideration but a practical consideration of disastrous proportions: it means that the hedonist can never be satisfied, for what he or she wants is an abstract and unobtainable universal, desperately pursued through innumerable particulars. But no number of particulars add up to the universal. No number of women (“1003 in Spain alone” according to Mozart’s librettist) adds up to *Woman*; and no number of pleasures, not even a lifetime full of them, adds up to *Pleasure*. It is an odd argument, to be sure, and one can imagine a dedicated hedonist waddling away with a shrug of the shoulders; but if we take the argument out of its abstract quasi-ontological form and think of it once again in terms of the simple and familiar argument that the pursuit of pleasure inevitably ends up in frustration and the desperate pursuit of ever-more intense and perverse pleasures to fill the void (which Hegel dramatically refers to as “death” (363,364)), the power of the argument, whether heeded or not, is undeniable.⁵³

53. But one could argue that it is only a very unthinking hedonist who would be trapped in this fatal progression; Alasdair MacIntyre argues, for instance, that if the hedonist is not interpreted so crudely as a Don Juan figure, but as a scholar enjoying his work, as a fisherman enjoying his fishing, then it is not as clear that one must become jaded, even if it is also true that “it exhausts you before you exhaust it, and just as much in scholarship as in sex.” Suppose the hedonist is aware of the danger of becoming jaded and, like Charles II, changes mistresses often enough—but not too often? And suppose he recognizes the essence of Hegel’s argument, that too easily obtained pleasures are ultimately unsatisfying, and replaces more pleasurable pursuits

Then, finally, comes Hegel's main argument, with which he ends the section (and which gives the section its title). It is the conversion of the pursuit of pleasure into *necessity*. *Faust* is explicitly quoted (360)⁵⁴ but Don Juan will do as well; what begins as desire becomes need; what starts as positive pleasure becomes the elimination of pain. Thus Don Juan initially enjoys his liaisons; later he needs them. Theoretically too, this transition has its (duller) manifestations; in the history of utilitarianism, for example, the principle of pleasure tends to give way to the negative principle of avoidance of pain.⁵⁵ The most tragic illustration of this principle is the transition from pleasure to necessity in drug addiction: a person begins with a few shots of heroin or morphine for pleasure. Soon, there may still be pleasure in it, but it will be more relief than euphoria, and the relief is all but overwhelmed by the despair of addiction. This is hardly "the good life"; it is slavery. And it is in this sense that the pursuit of pleasure turns into the degradation and "alienation" of need that should turn off any but the most dedicated hedonist.

The question is—Where to turn? As elsewhere in the dialectic, this is not clearly indicated in the form of consciousness itself. And yet again we have a "determinate negation". It is this: hedonism sought to find the good life through pleasure, but it turns out that the pursuit of pleasure tends to undermine itself and lead to degradation and dependency. So, if we pursue our search for the good life rationally, we should look for a life that is not dependent on anything, that is intrinsically good instead of degrading, while still being wholly particular (in the sense of pertaining to each of us as an individual person) and truly immediate (that is, which I can find in myself in any context whatsoever).

with hedonistic *projects*? Would he still not be a hedonist but yet escape Hegel's dilemma? Of course, one would eventually get tired of any such project too, but one of the premises of hedonism is in fact the shortness of life: the premise of "eat, drink and be merry" is always, "tomorrow we die." (In seminar, University of Texas at Austin, Feb. 4, 1980.)

54. "It despises intellect and science

The supreme gifts of man

It has given itself to the devil

And must perish." (ibid.)

55. For example, J.J.C. Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism," *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 3. (1953), and *An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961).

THE LAW OF THE HEART AND THE FRENZY
OF SELF-DECEIT (ROMANTICISM) (5, B, b.)

Let us penetrate to the bottom of our hearts, and let us reflect on what the state of things must be in which all men are forced to caress each other and to destroy each other, and in which they are born enemies out of duty and crooks out of self-interest.

The impossibility of attaining the real persons precipitated me into the land of chimeras; and seeing nothing that existed worthy of my exalted feelings, I fostered them into an ideal world which my creative imagination soon peopled with beings after my own heart. —Rousseau, *Confessions*

The turn from hedonism, still in the form of particular immediacy, is to that sense of “inner goodness” that is the experience of every adolescent and perpetually associated with the name Jean Jacques Rousseau. In fact, Rousseau might not implausibly be seen throughout all these sections, not just on the basis that we know so well how devoted Hegel (and Kant) had been to his work only a few years earlier, but because the somewhat schizoid fragments of Rousseau’s own thoughts and behavior fall without distortion into the three forms of “rational self-consciousness”: Jean Jacques in Venice, the jaded libertine; Jean Jacques the self-righteous, internally good man, corrupted by society; and Jean Jacques the confessor, pulling back from the ways of the world and praising his own virtue. But, as always, it would be seriously misreading Hegel to identify his “forms of consciousness” with a particular individual, and it is no less of a mistake when commentators identify these three forms with three different individuals. (Jean Hyppolite, for instance, identifies them with the odd trinity—Faust, Schiller, and Don Quixote—the first obvious, the second plausible but derivative—since Schiller too was an admirer of Rousseau—the third wholly fanciful and with no justification in the text.)⁵⁶ The middle form, in particular, has to be identified (as Hegel even tells us, in an unusually candid moment (357)) with a widespread tendency in the age,⁵⁷ to be identified not just with Schiller and traced back to Rousseau. It is that general heart-felt sentimentality that still goes by the name “Romanticism,” “the law of the heart” as opposed to the demands of desire and the pursuit of pleasure and opposed as well to the rule-bound cerebral conception of morals derived from Rousseau by such philosophers as Kant.

56. Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit”* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), p. 275n.

57. “. . . but since in our times that form of these moments is more familiar . . .” (357). Cf. *Logic*, 4: “The philosopher has to reckon with popular modes of thought.”

The "law of the heart" is a view of life that seems to fulfill the demands of the jaded hedonist. It is not, however, the only possible alternative, and the transition is not in that sense "necessary," much less a "deduction."⁵⁸ The hedonist might well stay a hedonist, increasingly jaded and self-destructive; he or she might become an absurdist, a sadist, retreat to the asceticism of "Unhappy Consciousness" or throw oneself into work or join the marines to learn some "discipline." These too retain the essential outlines of the form, insofar as they too are strictly personal if not immediate and, in different ways, attempts to salvage some sense of dignity after the degradation of spent hedonism.⁵⁹ But, of these various alternatives, Hegel presents us with one in particular—not surprisingly the one with which he was most familiar and, to an extent, most sympathetic. It is the very romantic retreat to one's pure inner feelings and the sense that one has discovered, *in oneself*, true goodness and the beauty of life. It is, needless to say, not an unpleasant or unfamiliar feeling. The problems emerge when one tries to elevate this heart-felt sentimentality to the level of ethics, to an articulate philosophy which applies to anyone other than oneself.

The "contradiction" here is familiar enough in Rousseau's own writings, as he wavers between love of humanity—each member of which shares his "inner goodness"—and clinically diagnosable paranoia, as if he alone were truly good and the world has set out to corrupt and destroy him. In fact, Hegel provides us with a series of arguments against the "law of the heart" which are virtually identical in form to some of the arguments he suggested against hedonism. They all come down to a single all-important claim, which is that the good life cannot be a property of an individual alone, and to think so can only emerge in a self-destructive self-righteousness ("the frenzy of self-conceit"). The arguments are, first, that what is taken to be a particular (the feeling of inner goodness) is in fact not this at all, but that,

58. Alasdair MacIntyre interprets the passage somewhat more rigorously, and insists that the "pleasure and necessity" section reaches conclusions which are the premises of "the law of the heart." He does not hold that *b* follows from *a* as such but that "anyone who thinks things through rationally must move through these stages." I think this is too strong. He also interprets Hegel with unusual rigor here in suggesting that the method requires a literal contradiction of the "p and not-p" variety to establish the "breakdown" of the section; but the set of problems summarized in Hegel's somewhat perverse interplay between universality and particularity do not give us a *reductio ad absurdum* of this kind. MacIntyre admits this, but accuses Hegel of failing in his method: I would argue that the characterization of the method in terms of strict "contradiction" is too strong.

59. One thinks immediately of Camus's Sisyphus, cursing the gods who have condemned him with "scorn and defiance," and Camus's own insistence that we confront the "absurdity" of life through admittedly pointless and aimless "rebellion."

if it is to be presented as anything more than a mere feeling, it must be a universal law. But at the same time, it cannot be universal without losing its essential reference to the singular individual, which is what motivates the theory in the first place. The dilemma, obviously, is the same we found in hedonism, the claim that a feeling (pleasure) is particular, destroyed by a demonstration that, if it is anything at all it must refer to the universal, but insofar as it is universal, it cannot be what it is supposed to be—a feeling. Thus the romantic becomes “in (his/her) own self a contradiction” (375);

The law of *this* particular heart is alone that in which self-consciousness recognizes itself; but the universally valid order has, through the realizing of that law, equally become for self-consciousness its own essential being and its own reality. Thus what contradicts itself in its consciousness has for it in each case the form of essence and its own reality. (ibid.)

and

this is a unity which is madness in general. . . . it holds the two sides in their contradiction to be immediately its essential being, which is thus in its inmost being distraught. (376)

Hegel did not argue against the hedonist that his or her hedonism would inevitably conflict with the hedonism of others, but he did argue that it required a break from society in general (362–63). He now argues that the self-righteous conceit of the romantic who elevates his or her own heart-felt sensibility above the dictates of law and society (which Rousseau, of course, chastised as “artificial” and “corrupt”) inevitably comes into conflict with society in general, which finds the romantic’s self-declared nobility and inner goodness to be “detestable” (373). The problem with moral sentiments, to restate the problem in standard philosophical parlance, is that different people may have different sentiments, and that cannot be—as Kant so forcefully argued against the British moral sentiment theorists—the basis of a universal morality.⁶⁰ To become what the romantic wants the law of his heart to become—namely, the law of the land, his heart-felt sentiments must be the same as everyone else’s; but here he runs back into the first, familiar, ontological dilemma: either this law is universal, or it cannot be law, but if it is universal, it can’t be in any sense the romantic’s own.

This in turn gives rise to a third, again repeated, argument—that the motivation of romanticism is that sense of individual self-realization,

60. Kant argues directly against Hume in the Preface to *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p. 13f.

but insofar as the romantic succeeds in suggesting that his own feelings should be elevated to the status of law, they thereby become alien to him, and take on just that oppressive, external status that he first objected to in the laws of society already established (371–76). Thus,

the heart-throb for the welfare of humanity . . . passes into the fury of consciousness to preserve itself from destruction . . . It therefore speaks of the universal order as a perversion of the law of the heart and its happiness, a perversion invented by fanatical priests, gluttonous despots and their minions, who compensate for their own degradation by degrading and oppressing others, a perversion which has led to the nameless misery of deluded humanity. (377)

Similarly, in Rousseau we find, “Nature made man happy and good, and society depraves him and makes him miserable.”⁶¹ Thus the romantic finds himself torn between his demand that his feelings be universalized into law and his recognition that this same universalization would constitute a perversion of those same feelings (378). He even begins to suspect that what most people call their own “law of the heart” is pure selfishness, and that—as in the case of Hobbesian selfishness—any attempt to institute universal order will in fact become “a universal state of war” (379). We are back to the “master-slave”:

The savage lives within himself, whereas social man, constantly outside himself, knows only how to live in the opinion of others and it is, if I may say so, merely from their judgment that he derives the consciousness of his own existence. —Rousseau, second *Discourse*

The dialectic we pursued in chapter 4, “Self-Consciousness,” now reappears. There, the progression depended upon the search for an adequate conception of self; here it follows the pursuit of the good life. These are not, of course, different questions but only different sides of one and the same search. The initial self-certainty of “Self-Consciousness” in “desire” is here translated into pleasure, the difference being, one can plausibly argue, that desire is at the beginning a question of need while the search for pleasure already presupposes the satisfaction (or at least the lack of desperation) of such basic needs. (Spinoza, for example, defines *desire* as simply our consciousness of appetite, while *pleasure* is what motivates a person to increasing energy and well-being.⁶²) Of course, desires can be made increasingly exquisite and self-created, and pleasure becomes—as we saw here—a matter of need, but this is only to say once again that desire and pleasure, self-certainty and hedonism, are two sides of the same eth-

61. Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. B. Foxley (New York: Dutton, 1974) p. 253.

62. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book III.

ical coin. They share the same contradictions—an artificial individuality, cut off from the social context that gives them meaning, and both are insatiable, since they have an inadequately defined and forever evasive object. The move away from hedonism and desire toward a sense of virtue, which in “Self-Consciousness” is expressed in the cosmic philosophy of Stoicism, here becomes expressed in a similar retreat to “the inside” and one’s own sense of integrity and independence (as “Thought” in Stoicism, as “the Law of the Heart” here). Stoicism and Romanticism become—and not only for Hegel—parallel movements, both reactions to, rationalizations of, and retreat from a sensuous world that has proven to be intolerable.⁶³

Virtue and the Way of the World (Pietism) (5, B, c.)

I drew this great maxim of morality, perhaps the only one of practical use, to avoid situations which put our duties in opposition with our interests and which show us our good in the hurts of others, sure that, in such situations, however sincere our love of virtue, we weaken sooner or later without realizing it, and become unjust and wicked in our actions, without having stopped being just and good at heart. —Rousseau, *Confessions*

What is the self-appointed “good man” to do when he finds that he cannot improve the world any more than he can satisfy his own insatiable desires? Well, one suggestion is that he retreat even further from the world, protect his virtue from temptation, avoid those situations in which either one’s sense of virtue or one’s desires are likely to be threatened. Once again, Rousseau forms our perfect model, but again it is essential to point out that this virtuous retreat was not in any sense the invention of Rousseau alone. It is, of course, parallel if

63. Karl Marx, romantic to the core in his youth, turned his own poetry against the romantic escapism in an early verse,

He is a German
And he lavishly throws about,
“Melody” and “soul”
At every opportunity.

That sounds romantic,
But dear young Sir,
It’s *only* sound.

(In S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 14.) Arnold Hauser too condemns romanticism as “irrational and escapist,” as “escape to Utopia and fairy tale, to the unconscious and the fantastic . . . to childhood and to nature, to dreams and madness . . . all the same feeling, of the same yearning for irresponsibility” (*A Social History of Art*, vol. 3) (New York: Vintage, 1951). And Irving Babbitt, a vitriolic critic, calls for “stripping idealistic disguises from egoism . . . exposing sham spirituality” (in *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919)).

not in some ways identical to the ascetic retreat of the "Unhappy Consciousness" (207–30; notice some similar language of "contradiction" and "deceit"), and it will be found again in the "Beautiful Soul," at the end of chapter 6. The romantic hero of "Virtue and the Way of the World" separates himself from the world and its temptations, and, having tried to change the world, even compromising his principles, drops the ideal of virtuous self-realization altogether. The parallel with "Unhappy Consciousness" is obvious, but the ending is not so "unhappy." In dropping his arrogant sense of individual virtue, the romantic also finds his way back into the world, as we shall see in a few moments.

Alasdair MacIntyre suggests quite plausibly that this section of the *Phenomenology* represents a reasonably accurate portrait of the Port Royale pietists of the Cistercian abbey (a few miles southwest of Paris).⁶⁴ This was not a monastic order as such, but rather a consortium of hermits, who were part of that rather strict and elitist group in the Catholic church called *Jansenists*. The most famous occupant of Port Royale, however, was Blaise Pascal. After a reputedly dissipated and extravagant period in Paris (1651–54), he experienced a violent mystical conversion there (November 1654) and lived there for some time. It is not clear whether Hegel had any interest in Pascal as such, but Pascal's somewhat "gloomy pessimism" (as Voltaire described it), with its extreme scepticism and emphasis on the frailty and contradictions of human life, fits perfectly into this segment of the *Phenomenology* and forms a precise parallel with both Skepticism (which Pascal explicitly defended) and "Unhappy Consciousness". "Virtue and the Way of the World," in a word, is a study of disciplined *disillusionment* as itself a pursuit of the good life, albeit in strictly negative form.

In Hegel's own lifetime, the Lutheran version of Pietism dominated the thinking of a great many theologians and philosophers, particularly Kant. It formed the ruling ideology at the *Stift* where Hegel went to college, and it is with this in mind that we should read Hegel's comment that this way of thinking and its keen demonstrations "all have vanished" (392). He calls its rhetoric "fatuous" (390); it too has "vanished." Here again, although divorced from any suggestion of distinctively religious terminology, is Hegel's reaction against the religion of his upbringing, and in much the same terms that he more harshly attacked it in his early essays. As opposed to the ancient conception of virtue, which plunged itself directly into the "way of the world" and tried to change things (390), this modern hermetic ver-

64. In seminar, Feb. 6, 1980. Cf. his discussion of the Benedictines in his *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

sion of virtue separates itself from the world and becomes only a hopeless, ineffectual, edifying form of rhetoric (ibid.).

And yet, it is important to distinguish this sense of "Virtue" (and its examples in the Jansenists and the Pietists) from the total withdrawal of the "Unhappy Consciousness," however similar and interrelated these may be.⁶⁵ The Port Royale pietists and the Kantians too were not indifferent to virtuous activity; they worked for the poor and did make an effort to improve the world, but always with a sense of futility. Thus the form of consciousness again becomes split in two, holding up an ideal of virtue which is unattainable on the one hand but on the other fully aware of and not attempting to deny the "way of the world" (as the ascetic "Unhappy Consciousness" had done). In its actions, the virtuous consciousness compromises its high ideals and does what little it can, trying to make the impersonal "way of the world" at least a bit better, to turn the individual aims and desires of the multitude into some good (382). Here Hegel briefly introduces one of the central themes of his philosophy of history, the idea of "universal law appearing . . . as a necessity within consciousness" (ibid.), acting *through* individuals who may not know *its* purposes. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, this is Hegel's famed "*List der Vernunft*," ("the cunning of Reason"), which uses individuals—whether the lowest-ranked foot soldier or Napoleon himself—as instruments to its own self-realization (as Spirit). Here in the *Phenomenology* the idea plays a modest role by way of *contrasting* the sense of public purposiveness (however unconscious) with the separateness and cynicism of the virtuous individual.⁶⁶ He is not yet the "world historical individual" that Napoleon, for example, would be. (Hegel too.) For the virtuous man makes the mistake of divorcing himself from the world of humanity, however charitably he may serve it from time to time (382–85). And this ultimately leads to that form of nihilism in which, even while sure of the "good existing in its own right," the virtuous man sees that efforts in the world are mere empty gestures, a "sham fight which he cannot take seriously," like the soldier in battle who can think only of keeping his sword well polished, or like the troop commander who would start a battle to keep the weapons in working order (386). The virtuous man participates in the way of the world but, at the same time, he does not do so.

Because the man of virtue does not see himself as part of society,

65. MacIntyre suggests a strong similarity here, in particular, with Pascal's attack on the Jesuits.

66. ". . . its shallow cunning, . . . its fine-spun explanations which know how to demonstrate the presence of self-interest in every action" (392).

he has no way of identifying himself with the way of the world, the power that does indeed cause significant change and provides a social order, whatever the virtuous man may think of it. But insofar as he stands apart from society, his ideal conception of virtue, which he (and his fellows) know in a privileged way, is of no use whatever (388). Even as the virtuous man gives up his impotent ideal and his edifying rhetoric (as the Germans had been doing for the decade or so since Hegel was in school) and submerges himself into the everyday exigencies of ordinary life, he has unwittingly come to recognize "by experience that 'the way of the world' is not as bad as it looked" (391). Ultimately, it is only through being an "actual" individual (a whole person) that one can partake in the good life and come to realize its meaning ("the movement of individuality is the reality of the universal" (ibid.)). It is with this realization that we begin to see, what in fact Hegel has been holding out for us all along, that the only meaning of individual life is to be found in the social world, that whether it is happiness or righteousness or virtue we seek, these are not to be pursued by isolated individuals—at the cost of self-destruction; they are communal possibilities, to be enjoyed in, through, and on the basis of, a given social order.

In attacking "Virtue and the Way of the World," Hegel is once again rejecting any philosophy or form of consciousness that is not in tune with the tangible human everyday world; he is objecting once again to a familiar kind of elitist moral pretentiousness and, in passing, he takes a few more swipes at the "old sourdough" pietist theology he was force-fed in the *Stift*. There is a deep philosophical point being made here too, one which particularly exercised Kant; it is the question whether there could in fact be a "disinterested" form of virtue—whether people could indeed be motivated to do the right thing apart from purely personal and self-interested motives (such as the promise of being rewarded or fear of being punished). The virtuous man of this section emerges as a cynic in the sense that he does not believe that there can be any such motivation; virtue is thus an impotent ideal, and motivation is entirely selfish (389). This is not the end of the story, however, only the end of this particularly cynical and self-righteous form of consciousness.

INDIVIDUALITY—IN AND FOR ITSELF:

THE BOURGEOIS ZOO (5, C, a. AND THE JENA LECTURES)

This intrinsically real individuality is at first again a *single* and *specific* one. The absolute reality which it knows itself to be is, therefore, as it will become aware, an *abstract, universal* reality lacking filling and content, merely the empty thought of this category. . . . The concept of this individuality, which as such knows itself to be all reality, is to begin with a *result* —*Phenomenology* (397–98)

If we are to understand what Hegel means by “individuality” in the *Phenomenology*, and why he is so dead-set against it, we have to first of all understand the force of Hegel’s realization that, contrary to most of the history of modern philosophy, the individual self is in no sense an immediately given element of consciousness (as Descartes claims in his *cogito*) but a socially created concept, and a most peculiar concept at that. The peculiarity is that, even as it is society and the social order that teaches us to think of ourselves as individuals in the first place, it thereby teaches us to ignore the fact that we are wholly social products and social participants. It teaches us to think of ourselves as ontological atoms for whom the formation of society is a puzzle and a mystery. Thus Hobbes and Rousseau and hundreds of other philosophers from Locke to Rawls have invoked a “social contract” to explain away this mystery, confusing from the start the formation of individuality in and through society with the myth that these same individuals, in some original state, gathered together to form society. It is this picture that Hegel vehemently rejects, for he realizes that it is not only a fiction but a logically impossible fiction; it presupposes the existence of individuals capable of forming contracts before the existence of society which alone constitutes the possibility of individuality and the validity of contracts.⁶⁷

It is this pretension—that only individuals are truly actual—that Hegel explores in the central section of the *Phenomenology*, entitled “Individuality which takes itself to be real in and for itself.” The easily recognizable incarnation of such individuality, as rational autonomy, is Kant, who dominates the last two-thirds of the section (419–37). But the larger number of pages is first given over to a discussion that has surprisingly proved to be the despair of many commentators, not so much in terms of its content as its significance.⁶⁸ It is quaintly en-

67. “It does not matter at all that Hobbes thought that the contract was a matter of actual history; the story of an original contract is defeated by a *logical* incoherence. . . . He tries to put together two notions that are incompatible, namely, subjects who can’t make contracts, and contracts” (Alasdair MacIntyre).

68. E.g., Findlay, *Hegel*, pp. 110–11.

titled "The spiritual animal kingdom and deceit, or 'the matter in hand' itself" (*Das geistige Tierreich und der Betrug, oder die Sache selbst*). Its content is readily identifiable as that form of individuality which loses itself in "the task at hand" ("*die Sache selbst*"), and Findlay rightly takes the academic scholarly community as a prime example.⁶⁹ But it would be curious if Hegel had taken up this all-important space between Rousseau and the question of virtue in Kant to go on at length about the familiar pretensions of academic life. He does this, indeed, but as part of a much larger picture. His discussion focuses on the notion of meaningful work and individual expression—which are by no means the unique domain of the scholars (a complaint Marx quite rightly leveled against Hegel). But this too is part of a much more general philosophical set of concerns which, unfortunately, are not at all obvious in the text of the *Phenomenology*. To see what they are, therefore, I want to turn to the lectures that Hegel was in fact giving to his students at Jena during the time he was working on the book. Within the context of the *Phenomenology*, the important point is that we are already talking about individuals immersed in society, attempting to express themselves as individuals within the social context, (though the concept of "Spirit" has not yet been invoked⁷⁰).

In 1805–6, Hegel prepared a course entitled "the Philosophy of Spirit," now published in Volume II of Hegel's *Jenenser Realphilosophie*.⁷¹ In the third part of the *Realphilosophie* ("Constitution") he discusses "the Universal as Multitude; the People" ("a multitude of individuals in general") and what is readily identifiable as the "General Will" of Rousseau, the awesome power of the people in willful unity. But he rejects here rather clearly the Rousseauan idea of a social contract, upon which this unity supposedly is based;

It is thought that the community (*Gemeinwesen*) rests on an original concept, to which each person is presumed by his silence to give consent— . . . The multitude is thus actually represented as constituting the community. It is as if from the beginning there was no community in existence.

69. Ibid. 110; the same example is picked up by Læwenberg *Hegel's Phenomenology*, p. 171, and by Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 171.

70. It is here that the equivocation in talk about "Spirit" which is so evident in the Preface becomes philosophically significant; the word refers not to the existence of shared identity but to the explicit *recognition* of this identity, "the recognition/realization of spirit as spirit." *Sittlichkeit*, on the other hand, does not require this recognition, and we should say that, though "Spirit" has not yet been invoked, *Sittlichkeit* has been with us all along, though unnoticed. Even "Pleasure and Necessity," for instance, involves *breaking* the unity of *Sittlichkeit*, which is thereby presupposed (357–62).

71. *Jenenser Realphilosophie*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hermann Glockner, 20 vols., (Stuttgart, 1927–30), trans. Allan Wood (unpublished).

The truth of the matter seems to be quite the opposite, that it is through tyranny and oppression—pure authority—that individuality learns to assert itself. The Master-Slave relationship (in the *Phenomenology* presented as a matter of self-identity) here appears as the foundation of the state, the political cauldron out of which individuality emerges through “education to obedience” and, eventually, rebellion. The master-slave structure of society evolves eventually into the “beautiful, happy freedom of the Greeks, which has been and still is so envied.” In the ideal society, “the people is at once dissolved into citizens (*Bürger*) and are at one with the state.” The image is pure Rousseau; the ideal is pure *polis*. But it is obvious that this ideal is not now realized in modern European society. Why not? Rousseau had the answer; so did Schiller and Hegel and Marx soon after him. Society has become *fragmented*; the role of the individual has been truncated and cut off from the whole. Individuals are no longer part of or representations of the universal; indeed, they struggle to survive even against the universal. And each individual is no longer the ideal “whole human being,” which Schiller thought he found in the ancient Greeks;⁷² he or she is now lost in increasingly narrow and tedious jobs, “the task at hand.” It is thus that Schiller envisioned a new harmonious holism through art and morality, and that Marx, following Schiller, looked forward to the day when a man could fish in the morning, hunt in the afternoon, and be a whole and happy human being, instead of a fragment of one. But notice, this fragmentation is not the abstract individuality that we have been discussing under the labels “hedonism,” “romanticism,” and “pietism”; it is a fragmentation within and determined by a certain kind of society. That society has a name; it is the society dominated by the *bourgeoisie*,—*bürgerliche Gesellschaft* or “civil society.”

The *Phenomenology* is not a political book, despite the fact that Hegel was developing his political philosophy even as he wrote it. There is virtually no talk of the formation of the state and no discussion at all of the soon to be all-important notion of *classes* (*Stände*). But in the lectures of 1805–06 he talks a great deal about class society and the nature of different classes, and it is in the light of this discussion that what I shall take the liberty of calling “the spiritual zoo” of the *Phe-*

72. Schiller: “Why is it that the individual Greek was able to be the representative of his age and why can no single modern man make a claim to be such? (*Letters on Aesthetic Education*). Cf. Herder, “Since together with the classes, ranks and professions, the inner faculties have unfortunately become separated . . . no single fragment partakes of the whole any more.” And Rousseau, “We have among us physicians, geometers, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians and painters, but no citizens” (discussed in Plant, *Hegel*, pp. 17f, 21, 25).

nomenology, the *bourgeois* society in which individuality is taken to be all-important, is to be understood. The "zoo" is not about society as such, but only about a certain class in a certain kind of society.

The content of the "zoo" section is mainly concerned with *work*, but work is here (as opposed to the labors of the slave in chapter 4) a component in a social nexus; it is meaningful only by being judged and admired by others, and it expresses a man's or woman's skills or talents only by being "externalized" in this social context (400–05). Here the familiar dialectic between the "inner" intentions and abilities of the worker and the "external" use and approval of it re-emerges, in much the same form that dictated the twists of the "master-slave" relationship; the external approval is not always appreciative of the individual on the basis of its actual products, and sometimes intentions and talents fail to be realized at all (406–14). But here is the synthesis previously missing between "disinterested" (impersonal) motivation and personal ambition and ability; people are capable of "disinterested" activity insofar as they are interested in the task at hand, even if they derive no "selfish" gain from its completion. What they gain, instead, is public approval. Thus the interests served by the task are public and "disinterested," but the individual is nevertheless wholly involved. (Consider a scholar laboring for years on a study of a philosopher who has been dead for 150 years; on the one hand, no task could be more disinterested and free from suggestion of personal gain; on the other hand, no enterprise would be more personally cautious since, for the scholar—as Hegel indelicately puts it—"the most important thing is his own vanity." But, of course, this is merely a hypothetical example.)

The fact that an individual's task and accomplishments are not measurable by the results alone, but dependent instead upon public approval, makes it all too easy for the individual to feel neglected, unappreciated, and resentful. Circumstances betray or prevent the expression of skill, and there is a rejection of the external in favor of the internal (from which Kant's ethics, "there is nothing good without qualification except a good will," takes its origins).

Years later, in 1843–44, Karl Marx will develop his first theory of "alienated labor" along much the same lines, inspired not only by Hegel but by the British political economists and Schiller.⁷³ If Hegel here develops a similar theory, however, it must be understood *not* as a precocious lament for the working class (for whom Hegel shows little sympathy) but as a Schiller-type objection to the fragmentation

73. "Alienated Labor" in his *Early Writings*, ed. Coletti (London: Penguin, 1974), esp. pp. 429–30.

of distinctively bourgeois labor. The equation of work and self-expression, although it might romantically be projected into the boring, exhausting, unrewarding work of the peasant or the industrial worker by those who have never been forced to so support themselves, refers quite specifically to the mental labors of the bureaucrat, the civil servant, the professor, who consider themselves a "universal class," working not just for their own interests but disinterestedly for The Good or The Truth.

In the *Realphilosophie*, Hegel divides up the classes or *Stände* of the society he knew. First there were "the lower classes" ("raw concrete labor," the peasants, "the elementary class"). The peasant is without individuality; he has his consciousness "in the earth." He toils; he is taxed, and the fact that the fruits of his labors are used to support noble lords and professional men from whom he receives no benefit in return is accepted by him as "just so." He does what he is told to do. "In war this class constitutes an uncivilized mass . . . it reflects only on its individuality and it grows spiteful." Liberal as he may have been, Hegel shows no semblance of sympathy for the peasants' lot; indeed, he barely considers peasants human. Theirs is not the proper realm of individuality or society; they are simply "the uncultivated ground of the whole." The peasant plays no role in this "zoo" section of the *Phenomenology*, nor, Hegel adds in the *Realphilosophie*, in the realization of "Spirit." It is as if, anticipating Marx's proper complaint, the entire laboring class were considered to be no more than a natural resource, part of the land to be exploited by bourgeois society but not part of it.⁷⁴

The burger class (*Bürgerstand*) is another matter; the businessman is "human" and "has stepped out onto the earth." He moves to the city; he has a skill; he owns property. "He knows himself as he is recognized in his particularity, and he impresses the stamp of his particularity on everything." He wants to assert himself and show off; he does not enjoy simple pleasure, as the peasant does: "he has the enjoyment of his own self-conceit." Here is the general theme of the "zoo"—being recognized and appreciated for one's work, one's talents, one's skills. The problem is, the "conceit" of one's own worth is never sufficiently expressed in external results; a writer finds that, however much praised, no piece he or she has so far written is up to snuff; it all falls short; the next one will be better. Thus begins the desperation (not only of writers) which resembles nothing more than

74. Cf. *The Philosophy of Right*, ¶203.

the hedonist's insatiable search for pleasure—more, always *more*.⁷⁵ The greedy culmination of the *Bürgerstand* is the merchant class (*Kaufmannsstand*), for whom reality is all external, “all having,” and money (“a great invention”) which makes possible infinite acquisition. “All needs are grasped together in this one element.” Particular goods and labors can now be “represented”; the signification of money replaces conceit. “Value is the jingle of coins.” Money becomes everything; “Currency must be honored, but family, welfare, life, etc, may all perish.” How much this sounds like Marx, writing a half-century later. Here is Hegel's liberalism, not on behalf of the peasants, perhaps, but in his familiar resentment of the “merciless” entrepreneurial class.

The business and merchant classes do, to a certain extent, play a role in the “zoo,” not just as resources and providers but as social structures as well. Their work, though not self-expression in a more exalted sense, is certainly the outward expression of individual abilities and talents in a way that “unskilled” physical labor is not. But in the terms of the *Phenomenology*, the important point is this—that the businessman and the merchant are not yet members of a *universal* class; their work is aimed at serving their own personal interests and not in serving the whole. (There may be, à la Adam Smith, an “invisible hand” that coordinates these personal interests into an over-all harmony, but this is not Hegel's particular concern here.⁷⁶)

In contrast to the business and merchant classes, then, Hegel introduces his extremely important notion of a “universal class,” the class of workers who aim not just at their own good but at The Good of society. The civil servant, in doing his job, aims at nothing less than Justice, and the scholar, in doing his, aims at nothing less than The Truth. Later, in the *Philosophy of Right*, the “universal class” will refer to the bureaucracy as a whole, from the least civil servant up to the supreme court justices.⁷⁷ In the *Phenomenology*, it is clear that the “zoo” consists largely of skilled, creative laborers, skilled in the sense that “execution” is essential (as in an artist or a writer, as well as a craftsman), “creative” in the sense that “individuality” and “original determinateness” are essential (411). Again, one might project these images on a tradesman (there are, of course, creative electricians, creative

75. In *Key Largo*, Bogart sums up the Hegelian dialectic to Edward G. Robinson: “I’ll tell you what you want, Ricco; what you want is *more*, always more.” “Yee-ah, that’s what I want, *more*,” sneers Ricco.

76. And yet, Hegel had read Smith only a few years before, and he is by no means unimportant in the early lectures on “*Sittlichkeit*” in 1802–3; see Harris and Knox trans., *System*, p. 74ff. of the Introduction. Also Plant, *Hegel*, p. 57.

77. *Philosophy of Right*, pp. 131–34.

accountants to be sure) but it is clear that the paradigm of Hegel's concern here is the creative artist, who interfuses individuality and objectivity, personal expression and the universal.

At the top of the social pyramid (leaving aside the monarch), is a sub-class of the "universal class," the class of the professional man (*Geschäftsmann*) whose work is "extremely divided, abstract. . . ." His "inner disposition is to fulfill his duty." In particular, there is the scholar, whose duty is knowledge and "it is only the universal that counts." This is "Science" (*Wissenschaft*) and it is only in Science that "Spirit has any object it can treat without reference to desire and need." It is indeed the scholar who perfectly fits into the "zoo" imagery of the *Phenomenology*, but only as the paragon of a certain kind of society, a society which *in general* praises individual devotion to work and creativity but in fact makes this possible only for a very small and select group of people.

Even the scholar, however, finds that this ideal of dedication and serving the universal as an individual has its paradoxes. This is the dialectic that defines the "zoo"; as the worker of the universal class externalizes the object of his labors (namely, *Thought*), his work is no longer his. (This is, of course, the same argument we found in the dilemma of the slave in chapter 4, and it is also the general model of "alienated labor" in Marx.) The scholar's talents will be evaluated by others on the basis of what he has produced, and with this realization, either the scholar refrains from production, content to be judged on what he can convince everyone he *can* do, or he produces work no longer with an eye to the universal so much as a total concern with his own performance (415).⁷⁸ Thus once again we find a paradox arising from the opposition of internal (talent, intentions) and external (the products of one's labors) and this paradox destroys the whole point of the "task in hand," namely, "objectivity," concern for the object alone. But this is not the paradox of the scholar alone. He or she is only the most dramatic representation of the ideal that permeates the whole of bourgeois society, namely—the expression of one's individual self in work that is at the same time wholly objective and universal. If this is impossible for the scholar, so it is impossible too as an ideal for that kind of society which does indeed, as Hegel imagines,

78. This is a familiar phenomenon in academia, of course, the "brilliant" professor who never publishes a line. But the same phenomenon will be found in all the professions, especially law and certain specialities in medicine, where "reputation" is often, at least for a long time, more powerful than performance. This is certainly not true, however, among craftsmen and skilled workers, for whom performance is the only test of ability, nor is it true of businessmen and merchants, for whom it is not "what's inside" that counts but the so-called "bottom line."

turn into a "zoo"—civilized, peaceful, and busy. Better than a Hobbesian war of all against all, but still a "zoo," not *Sittlichkeit*, all the same.

The "zoo" section of the *Phenomenology* takes the individual to be primary, but primary only in the context of his or her fellows. He or she *is* by being recognized, not in the crude mode of domination and submission, independence and dependence, as in the "master-slave" parable, but by way of having a place in society, an exalted place as a producer, a creator, an agent of self-expression. But this sense of place is always contingent on the views and the recognition of others, and one's conception of oneself and one's talents are made "actual" only in outer, comparative expression (397–404). There is no valid distinction between the inner character and the outer expression of character (401) (a familiar argument from chapter 3 and the first part of 5 as well). The product of work makes a person's inner nature explicit, but no single performance, or string of performances, adequately represents the "true individual" (405). Thus the split arises between what one *is* and what one has *done*, and we are ambivalent about what we are judging—the person or the work (406–09). Occasionally, one reaches "the heart of the matter" and, in a single instance, gives full-self expression (the definitive poem, the perfect piece) but this too leaves unsatisfied the continuing existence of the creator (410). (Consider Rimbaud, who completed his master works before the age of 21; what could he do with himself then?) And so one shifts from the emphasis on the product to an emphasis on the process, the activity itself (411–14), the same move that Hegel makes in the Preface of the *Phenomenology* from the "results" of philosophy to the activity itself. The emphasis is shifted to the effort instead of the success (412–13) and even failures are interpreted as expressive successes (414); much modern art might be included here, and reams of embarrassing poetry.⁷⁹ As the shift moves "inward" the work itself counts for less and less, the character of the agent more and more (415). (Not long after Hegel, the artist becomes a hero as such, even in the absence of work. The French romantics of the 1830s were a prime example, with the "Bohemian" image that we inherited from them.⁸⁰)

79. The expression "an important failure" makes sense only given this conception of art, and the very idea of "self-expression" among the Romantics of 1806 had overwhelmed the more traditional canons of taste and appropriateness, not to mention quality of performance.

80. One thinks of Hugo's friend, Théophile Gautier, a totally forgettable writer, expending his energies trying to "exasperate the philistines." In Germany, of course, these Bohemian pretensions had begun a quarter-century before, with the "Romantic circle" that Hegel so lampooned in the *PG*. For them too, the image often outstripped the talent and the performance, and Marx's comment, "It's *only* sound," is an echo of Hegel's no less sarcastic comments in the Preface.

Intention soon becomes everything; *seriousness* becomes the primary virtue, no matter what the results (417). Mutual criticism takes the place of encouragement and approval (*ibid.*) and this in turn makes the inward turn even more inevitable, until, finally, the only thing good in itself, without qualification, is, as Kant says, “a good will.”

It is work that makes us into true individuals, Hegel argues, but this clearly means that some forms of work—and some workers—are more distinguished as individuals than others. It is a professional’s pretension and the ultimate *bourgeois* arrogance (so sarcastically described by Stendhal in *Red and Black*, for example): a man’s worth ultimately depends not on his work nor even on his outer success but on the inner talent and virtue that is reflected by that success—or even by the lack of it. Some animals in the “zoo” are thereby worth far more than others, even if it is the others that do the hard work and bring about the results. It is with this bourgeois bit of arrogance that we turn to the most distinguished beast in Hegel’s “zoo,” the universal professional philosopher—Immanuel Kant.

MORALITY AND SITTlichkeit:

THE CRUCIAL CONFRONTATION (5, C, b. & c.)

It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*. Intelligence, wit, judgement, and any other *talents* of the mind, as qualities of *temperament*, are without doubt good and desirable in many respects . . . but [it is] a good will that [alone] constitutes the indispensable condition of our very worthiness to be happy. —Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*

The two short sections on Kant’s morality, “Reason as lawgiver” (419–28) and “Reason as testing laws” (429–37), are indisputably among the most important sections in the *Phenomenology*. If they are short, that is perhaps because here more than elsewhere Hegel knew exactly what he was arguing, for he was repeating arguments he had already published at greater length, and no more obscurely. In particular, the arguments here against Kant had already appeared in his “Natural Law” essay in 1802–3, and in his *System der Sittlichkeit*, based on lectures of the same period. The role of Kant here is unmistakable, and the juxtaposition of Kant’s morality—as the final form of consciousness in “Reason” and “Individuality”—and *Sittlichkeit*, as the first sec-

tion of the chapter on "Spirit", is *the* definitive move of Hegel's entire philosophy.⁸¹

The general drift of the *Phenomenology* is from the particular to the universal, and the ethical argument thus far in "Reason" is a series of transitions from the very particular search for the good life in individual pleasure, to the still individual but more universal concern for virtue (in which the concept of "law" is introduced), and now to the fully universal concept of moral law as embodied in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. It is still part of "Individuality" because this law is to be found in and validated by each and every rational individual, but it is universal in that there is one and only one set of laws that is valid for all people, even "every rational creature." But if the drift in general is from the particular to the universal, it is equally important to appreciate Hegel's insistence on the "determinate" particular. The problem with hedonism, with the "law of the heart" and the virtuous ascetic, the problem with the Stoic, the Skeptic, and the medieval Christian too, and finally, the problem with Kant, is that the individual self that is supposed to be the locus of selfhood or the good life is, on closer examination, no one in particular at all. It is an artificially conceived atom in isolation from society and culture which alone can give it meaning. They all prove to be not what they seem, not a conception of self or the good life, but a kind of confused abstraction from concrete social life or *Sittlichkeit* which will not bear critical examination. This is just as true of Kant's formalist ethics as the hedonist's search for pleasure and the Stoic's search for freedom; it is without content, wholly indeterminate, and, consequently, empty.

For the reader who is not already well versed in Kant's moral philosophy—in fact, for the reader who *is* well versed—Hegel's presentation of Kant will no doubt seem inadequate and unfair. Considering that Hegel for years took Kant's word as unquestioned law in these matters, the glib dismissal of what he himself thought to be the most important single theory in the entire history of ethics is indeed scandalous. Kant's theory is opaquely introduced in two short paragraphs (419–20); the presuppositions of the theory (that morality *is* the essence of [practical] self-consciousness and that reason knows "immediately" what is right and good) are presented in two even shorter

81. This is, of course, a particularly "ethical" over-all view, but the same point can be made, and is often suggested by Hegel himself, with reference to the shift from Kantian "Understanding" to "Reason" (and the logical shift to "the Idea"). One might take the historicist Hegel to the extreme and even interpret these more cognitive shifts in terms of the ethical turn; indeed, Hegel suggests no less than this both in the last paragraph of the *PG's* Preface and in his *Logic* of the *Encyclopaedia*, 6, 7, 13, 14.

paragraphs (421–22); and the theory is tested and rejected in less than another seven pages (423–28). This is quite a novelty for a theory which, even in Hegel's time, had already inspired scores of enormous volumes of exposition, criticism, and defense.

Without attempting to provide another *précis* of Kant's moral theory, it is nevertheless necessary to state with some simple clarity the propositions which Hegel is here presenting and challenging so tersely. First of all, Kant's moral theory is based on his notion of *rational autonomy*, on the ability of each individual to recognize the good, on the basis of reason.⁸² Indeed, it is reason that *gives* us the principles that define the good, and for this reason, Hegel aptly titles his first section on Kant (chapter 5, C, b.) "Reason as lawgiver" (*die gesetzgebende Vernunft*). The reason here described is what Kant calls "practical reason," which in Fichte had become "self-consciousness" as such, and this is what Hegel calls it here (419). It is individual, but it is also "a universal self" (*ibid.*). The dictates of reason, or "the moral law,"⁸³ are "absolute" and "authoritative" (420) insofar as, in Kant's words, morality is the intention ["will"] "to act out of respect for the law [that is, reasons's law] alone."⁸⁴ Respect for the law (or "duty") is sharply distinguished in Kant from personal desires and "inclinations," for to act "in accordance with" the law is quite different from acting "for the sake of the law."⁸⁵ Kant begins his entire discussion by insisting (as we have already quoted) that the only thing good in itself and without qualification (i.e. "absolute") is a "good will".⁸⁶ What this will does is to present us with *formal* laws which are at the same time applicable to particular moral contents.⁸⁷ The requirement of formality is demanded by the very fact that these are rational (not merely empirical) laws; the requirement of applicability, of course, is essential to having a morality, as opposed to a merely abstract and inapplicable conception of virtue, as in "Virtue and the way of the world."

In an unforgivably obscure rendition of Kant, Hegel insists that

The object [of morality] is in its own self *real* as object, for it contains within itself the distinction characteristic of consciousness; it divides itself into "masses" (*Massen*) or spheres which are the *determinate laws* of the absolute essence. These "masses," however, do not obscure the Concept [*Begriff*], for the moments of being and pure consciousness

82. *FMM*, pp. 399–402, 430–31, 440–41.

83. *Ibid.* p. 392: "the sole aim of the present work is to seek out and establish the supreme principle of morality."

84. *Ibid.*, p. 400–01.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 397–98.

86. *Ibid.*, 393.

87. *Ibid.* ch. ii. esp. p. 421 ff.: Hegel, "Natural Law," pp. 75–80.

and of the self remain enclosed within it—a unity which constitutes the essence of these “masses” and which, in this distinction, no longer lets these moments fall apart from one another. (420)

Miller's translation of “*Massen*” as “masses” only adds seriously to the confusion; in this context, it might much better be translated as “criteria,” and then, at least, we know what Hegel is talking about. As every introductory philosophy student knows, the heart of Kant's moral theory—the embodiment of morality and duty—is what he calls “the categorical imperative.” (Hegel doesn't use this term, but if the reason is to avoid the impression that he is talking about Kant in particular, the omission is perversity, not an appeal to universality.) Kant's phrase *the categorical imperative* (and *the moral law*) lends itself to a certain amount of confusion, as if there were, in effect, only a single law, a single criterion, to cover the whole realm of moral concerns, from cheating in an algebra exam to cold-blooded murder. Kant quickly lets us know, however, that although morality is unitary, it does admit of various “formulations,” such as,

Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.⁸⁸

and

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.⁸⁹

The categorical imperative may thus be a unitary phenomenon of practical reason, but it nevertheless “divides itself” into more particular criteria which are more easily applicable to cases. The various formulations of the categorical imperative can in turn be further “divided” (more accurately, “instantiated”) into particular moral rules, such as “do not lie”, “do not steal,” and “do not kill.”

With this as background, Hegel sets up his criticism of Kant, which is, simply, that such formal principles, no matter how further “divided,” never give us a sufficiently precise criterion to make particular moral decisions. Furthermore, the moral law is justifiable only in its own terms, not by appeal to its origins and not by appeal to its consequences (421). (This is the meaning of “autonomy.”) But how, then, can a particular moral law be justified? One might suppose that “sound Reason knows immediately what is right and good” and that “this particular law” is valid (422), but given Kant's uncompromising conception of autonomy, how could one decide for oneself between al-

88. *FMM*, p. 421; *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 30.

89. *Ibid.* p. 429.

ternative laws? Kant here becomes, according to Hegel, a kind of ethical intuitionist, who knows valid laws “*immediately*.”⁹⁰ And indeed, though not so simply, Kant does take morality as a kind of *given* to be analyzed and explained, rather than justified. And this “ethical certainty,” like sense-certainty and self-certainty, is the focus of Hegel’s objection.

Hegel’s argument, simply stated, is this: Kant assumes that an appropriately formulated moral imperative will both follow from reason itself *and* apply to particular cases unambiguously. But, Hegel argues, there are any number of formulations which follow from reason, all of which are universal in form, and none of them, as universal, specify any particular behavior in *this* particular instance. For example, if the instance is a situation in which one is tempted to lie, the appropriate moral law would be “everyone ought to speak the truth” (242).⁹¹ Hegel’s first move is this: he says, the commandment says one ought to speak the truth, but what it “means” is that one ought to speak the truth *if* one knows it. The argument resembles the argument in “Sense-Certainty,” and the point is the same, to show that what looks like an unproblematic and unconditional claim in fact has to be qualified immediately. Once one admits that the imperative has to be qualified, it is no longer “categorical” or “unconditional”; it becomes, Hegel too quickly concludes, “completely contingent” (*ibid.*), that is, “contingent” on whether or not I happen to know the truth. The imperative remains universal in *form*, Hegel says, but a contingent content undermines this universality.

Hegel’s argument here resembles many of the arguments in Plato’s Socratic dialogues, profound in its insight, superficial and sophistical in its presentation. The argument Hegel here anticipates (he had already developed it to some extent in his earlier “Natural Law” essay) is an argument that has since become familiar to every student of Kant. Hegel is simply wrong when he suggests that the introduction of a qualification which turns on a contingency undermines the “universality” of the law, for if this were true there would be no laws whatever insofar as every law has a content that turns on some contingency. (“Thou shalt not kill,” even if utterly unqualified by “except in war,” etc., remains contingent upon the existence of some living beings who can be killed.) But what is true is that, having introduced one kind of qualification, it is not at all clear—as a matter of “pure rea-

90. Walsh points out that Kantian commentators, including H. J. Paton, have held this view too, for Kant did hold that certain moral conclusions “leap to the eye” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, II), p. 8; Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics* p. 26; Paton, *The Categorical Imperative* (New York: Harper and Row, 196x), p. 138.

91. Kant, *FMM*, pp. 402–03, 441.

son"—where this qualification should stop. Either the law is a tautology, or it is contingent; that is Hegel's argument. Could the law just as accurately be formulated as "tell the truth when you can" or "tell the truth unless you are a philosopher" or "tell the truth if you deem your listener worthy of it" or "tell the truth when you must." Are these all universal in *form*, Hegel asks, and what qualifications are valid inclusions in the formulations of the law? As far as the notion of "universal law" is concerned, there seem to be no criteria concerning the validity of some formulations rather than others, apart from the general exclusion of particular references (names and pronouns designating particular individuals or groups). The most abstract laws are always incomplete and in need of qualification ("tell the truth"), while the most specific and qualified laws become so specific that they lose their status, in practice if not in form, as laws ("tell the truth if you know it, if you speak the same language as your listener, if you have no reason to believe that it will be misunderstood or misinterpreted, if it will not do grossly more harm than good. . ."). What is in question, in other words, is the very notion of "universality."⁹² Form is not enough, and the "idea of a universal, absolute content," Hegel argues, cannot be made intelligible (426).

In a famous passage in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that

It is doubtless in this sense [of an action done for the sake of duty] that we should understand too the passages from Scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbor and even our enemy. For love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty—although no inclination impels us, and even though natural and unconquerable disinclination stands in our way—is *practical*, and not *pathological* love, residing in the will and not in the propensities of feeling . . .⁹³

It is to this passage that Hegel refers when he uses as his example, "another celebrated commandment . . . 'Love thy neighbor as thyself'" (425). Now, insofar as this is a matter of reason and "intelligence," the amount of good I can do for someone "as an individual, is so insignificant that it is hardly worth talking about." But insofar as my love for a person is a matter of "sentiment" (i.e. "pathological," according to Kant), my action is wholly contingent and transitory (*ibid.*). The argument here is inadequate but it suggests, as Hegel obviously knew in his "Natural Law" essay, another argument of considerable power; the question is not the impotence of individual action (which

92. For an extended discussion and a defense of Kant against Hegel, see Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics* (New York: Knopf, 1961), esp. p. 251ff.

93. Kant *MM*, p. 399.

has nothing to do with the Kantian or the Scriptural commandment) but the *content* of morality in general. Love (which we remember Hegel had elevated to the pinnacle of ethics only a few years before⁹⁴) always has a *particular* content, even if it is, in fact, universal both in the sense that its moral worth is applicable to everyone and that everyone ought to be loved. The content of love, and thus the command to love, is thus always personal, and it is in this sense that Hegel tells us, obscurely, that “such laws stop short at Ought, they have no actuality; they are not laws but merely commandments” (425).

It is not my purpose to turn a pig’s ear into a philosopher’s purse here, and I think that it must be admitted by any reader that Hegel’s arguments here are unsatisfactory. But what Hegel *ought* to have said is rendered at least in his conclusion, which is that it is not the “making of the law” in “the mere form of universality” which is essential to ethics and morals (427) but the determinate *content* of reason, which means, particular people and particular situations (427–28). This is not to say (as an ethical intuitionist might say) that one simply recognizes the good, in any particular case.⁹⁵ Reason still plays a role, which in Kant appears as a “test” for deciding, for any proposed law of morality, whether it is indeed valid or not.

The distinction between section b (“Reason as lawgiver”) and section c (“Reason as testing laws”) may be fine enough to try the patience of the reader, but it is, on the one hand, a distinction which can be found, more or less, between the first two parts of Kant’s *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (and, to some extent, between the *Foundations* and its successor, *the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1797) and, on the other hand, a philosophical distinction of some importance. “Reason as lawgiver” claims that the moral law is presented *by* reason and can be known to be valid as such. The question is, how one knows what the law given by reason might be and, ultimately, whether reason (as understood by Kant, as an autonomous individual faculty) is capable of presenting us with any laws at all. The argument of “Reason as testing laws,” however, is the more modest claim that, whatever the *source* of the proposed laws, (whether given to us by reason or inclination or suggested by our friends), reason has the capacity to tell us whether indeed it is a moral law or not.

Hegel’s argument against “Reason as lawgiver” was that, despite the

94. Both in “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate,” and in the “Love” fragment of 1797–98 (both in Knox, pp. 182–301, 302–8).

95. The British intuitionist-utilitarian G.E. Moore is exemplary as a contrast here, but there are strong elements of intuitionism in Fichte, before Hegel. In Kant, however, morality is always tied to universal principles and never consists of an isolated particular.

original appearance of certain laws in unqualified universal form, it turned out that they were indeed qualified, and that once these qualifications were made explicit, we lost what we originally thought that we had, a truly universal and absolute law that was independent of all contingencies. The argument against "Reason as testing laws," accordingly, must be that, not only does the moral law inevitably include contingencies, but that the "test" of such laws is also based on contingencies and prior evaluations and it is not, therefore, as Kant had argued, a question of purely formal considerations, in particular, "logical consistency."

Kant's argument, given his ambition to present a purely *formal* conception of moral laws as based on reason alone, required that the criteria by which we judged our moral "maxims" (our intentions to act) could not depend on the merely empirical (therefore "contingent") predictions about the actual consequences of our actions. This would turn morality into a matter of predicting and testing the consequences of action and evaluating these consequences in terms of their good and bad effects, which is to sacrifice moral concerns to the contingencies of circumstance and sacrifice the moral notions of "right and wrong" to the merely utilitarian notions of "good and bad." It is important to see what is wrong with "contingencies"; Hegel is not here imposing on Kant anything that Kant did not himself demand. If reason is to deliver to us *a priori* commandments which are valid as laws, it must do so without reference to consequences and without reference to the particularities of circumstances and personal "inclinations" in any given case.⁹⁶ Similarly, if reason is to "test" proposed laws *a priori* (that is, not the proposed law but the standards of the test must be *a priori*) that test must be independent of the circumstances, irrespective of consequences and unconcerned with inclinations; thus, "the only thing that is good without qualification is a good will." The fact that, with the best intentions, one caused a wholesale disaster and mass unhappiness is not of *moral* relevance, and the fact that, despite malicious intentions, one brought about a great good for a great many people, is no reason for praise of any kind either. This is why Kant is so adamant that truly moral considerations be unmixed with merely contingent and particular considerations, and it is why Hegel takes such evident delight in showing how morality and moral laws, in every case, are hopelessly impure and contaminated with contingency.

What kind of a test of laws could be carried out without any refer-

96. Kant, *FMM*, pp. 428–29.

ence to consequences, circumstances, or inclinations? One kind of test in particular—an appeal to logical consistency. A law can be judged by its effects only by considering the persons and situations in which it will be used, but it can be evaluated for its consistency without considerations of this kind. What Kant means by “inconsistency” is by no means straightforward: it is not the simple inconsistency of a conceptual falsehood (e.g. “Tell the truth when you lie” or “Don’t steal anything that is not already your own”⁹⁷) but the complex inconsistency of the following procedure;

- 1) generalize the maxim (intention) of your action. (Ask yourself, “what if everyone were to act so?”)
- 2) see if the generalization contradicts itself, in the sense of making the original maxim impossible to carry out.⁹⁸

The word “impossible” in (2) refers to *logical* impossibility; it is not enough if, when generalized, the maxim has disastrous consequences or becomes extremely difficult to carry out. (Thus the hedonist, if he generalizes his maxim “enjoy yourself, even at others’ expense,” may find it increasingly difficult to enjoy himself, and the world may indeed become an intolerable and unhappy place, but this alone is not enough to show that hedonism is inconsistent.) If, for example, we take the Kantian example of promise-keeping, the argument would be as follows:

- (1) we generalize our maxim (“I am going to make a promise that I know I can’t keep”) into a universal law (“Suppose everyone would make promises they didn’t intend to keep?”)
- (2) we evaluate this generalization for its consistency, in the sense noted. Kant says,

I see straight away that this maxim can never rank as a universal law of nature and be self-consistent, but must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law that everyone believing himself to be in need can make any promise he pleases with the intention not to keep it would make promising, and the very purpose of promising itself impossible, since no one would believe he was being promised anything, but would laugh at utterances of this kind as empty shams.⁹⁹

This is reason’s role in testing laws, testing the consistency of generalized maxims. Inconsistent generalizations are conclusively not moral. (It is not so clear that consistent generalizations are therefore moral, which is why so much of morality so conceived is negative, i.e. laws to

97. One can imagine a circumstance or a strategy in which either of these would not be an actual inconsistency, of course, but, at face value at least, they are inconsistent in an obvious way in which “lie if you have to” is not.

98. *FMM*, pp. 417–23.

99. *Ibid.* 422–23.

the effect of what one ought *not* to do.) It is this role that Hegel now challenges. But before we state his argument, let us repeat his motive: if he can show that individual rational autonomy is inadequate both in the formulation and the testing of moral laws, then he has his argument for the necessity of *Sittlichkeit*, the "ethical order," which these abstract formulations of moral laws in fact presuppose, even if (as in Kant) it is ignored.

The ground we have just examined is covered quickly (429); if reason is no longer considered to be authoritative with regard to the presentation of moral laws, it may still be authoritative as the test of them. (The argument is confused by distinguishing moral consciousness, on the one hand, and "we"—Hegel and his readers—on the other.) And so, without looking at either origins or consequences, we look at "the commandment simply as commandment," testing it impersonally and without moral concern ourselves (*ibid.*). But, the test does not get very far (430). "The criterion is a tautology," Hegel tells us, and "indifferent to the content, one content is just as acceptable to it as its opposite." To say that "the criterion is a tautology" is a somewhat misleading way of saying that the only criterion for acceptability to be decided by reason alone is logical consistency and that, on the grounds of logical consistency, could it not be that a moral proposition and its opposite might *both* be consistent? Hegel's example, which he had developed in some detail in his "Natural Law" essay,¹⁰⁰ is the case of (private) property, which leads both into a general consideration of distributive justice and the quite specific commandment against stealing—which presupposes that someone *owns* the property to be stolen.¹⁰¹ Suppose we generalize the principle that there ought to be property; there is no contradiction. Now suppose that we generalize the principle that there should be no property, "that something belongs to nobody, or to the first-comer who takes possession of it, or to all together, to each according to his need or in equal portions . . ." But this gives rise to no contradiction either. In what follows (430–31) Hegel considers various formulations of property and non-property in relationship to need and accessibility, but what he concludes is simply that, as general laws, neither private property nor communism generate any contradictions, even if, in the attempt to apply specific laws to specific cases, one does find para-

100. "Natural Law," pp. 79–83. The "tautology" language comes from there as well.

101. This excludes considerations of public property, which is owned by no one (or by everyone) but can still obviously be stolen. That is not relevant to the argument here. Of course, Hegel also could not have known about the twist of the argument provided by Pierre Proudhon several years later when he announced, flatly, "property is theft."

doxes. But these are the same in either case, since it is the very nature of "things" that they are not as such owned (which Hegel confusingly refers to as their "universality") and so again we have no ruling about what is moral and what is not.¹⁰²

Now Kant would conclude at this point that no moral issue is involved, thus eliminating Hegel's putative counter-example as a counter-example to his *moral* claims. But here the question should be pushed—What moral laws *are* so testable, such that reason and consistency alone can tell us what to do or not to do? There is no question about what Hegel *ought* to do at this point; he should consider more examples. Consider the obviously moral commandment "Thou shalt not steal," for instance: if one generalizes the maxim "don't steal," do we get a contradiction? Yes we do, in the sense that, if everyone took what they wanted the institution of private property would be undermined in just the same way that the institution of promise-keeping is undermined, according to Kant. But are these institutions themselves desirable? This is the question reason does not ask, and if Hegel had here pursued an argument he had already used (in the "Natural Law" essay) he could have struck a powerful blow against Kant: namely, that all that Kant's criterion shows, at most, is that a certain institution, which a given maxim presupposes, could not be sustained, given a certain generalized principle. But surely the question of stealing depends on our evaluation of the institution of private property (consider a young communist, who steals on principle) just as our evaluation of breaking promises depends upon our evaluation of the institution of promise-keeping.¹⁰³ Hegel's conclusion here might then justifiably be that Kant has begged the question; he has accepted certain institutions without question and then defended certain principles that define them with a circular argument. This is his "tautology," that if you accept the institution of promise-keeping you also accept the necessity of keeping your promises (whether or not you actually do so), and if you accept the institution of private property, you also accept the commandment that you ought not to steal other people's property (even if you do so). Unfortunately, Hegel pursues no such argument in the *Phenomenology*. On the basis of the single argument about "property" (430–431), one would not be unjustified in concluding that Hegel has not even begun to make his case against

102. Cf. *Philosophy of Right*, 135: "... by this means any wrong or immoral line of conduct may be justified."

103. See Walsh, p. 23. Marx takes this same argument (in his early writings) and turns it around in the predictable way; it is the illegitimacy of the institution of property that lends a certain legitimacy to the act of theft.

Kant. This is unfortunate because I believe that he does have a case, and a good one.¹⁰⁴

In what follows, Hegel brings to a close the entire discussion of the search for the good life and individual morality. He points out that even the most honest moral philosophers tend to become lost in fiddling around with the criteria for testing moral laws instead of engaging themselves in the moral world itself (433). He expresses the danger of intuitionism in reaction to this, in which laws appear "each by itself immediately as a reality," often inconsistent and arbitrary, as in the "law of the heart."

To legislate immediately in that way is thus the tyrannical insolence which makes caprice into law and ethical behavior into obedience to such caprice. (434)

Worst of all, there are those philosophers who, because they have learned to see through the pretense of rational tests of laws, have "the insolence of a knowledge which argues itself into a freedom from absolute laws, treating them as an alien caprice" (ibid.). In other words, they become *nihilists*, like Nietzsche, declaring themselves above or beyond the law just because they have the philosophical ability to refute all rational claims and all possible tests and arguments.¹⁰⁵ But this is the most dangerous confusion, and the ultimate reason for rejecting not only Kant but the whole of individuality as an approach to ethics. The moral force of the law is to be found not in reason (in Kant's individual sense of rational autonomy) but in the "reason" of an ethical community (435–36). No law has its grounds in "the will of a particular individual" (not even the king); "it is the absolute *pure will of all*." "It is not a commandment, which only *ought* to be; it *is* and is *valid*" (436). In other words, it is not a set of ideals which are to be juxtaposed *against* the actual practices and deeds of men and women, but the system *of* those practices and deeds as such. Whether we are consciously aware of that system—in the sense of being able to formulate and canonize it into bold propositions, as in the Ten Commandments or as in Kant's morality—is not, first of all, the crucial moral question. The crucial question is that there *be* such an ethical order, and this has nothing to do with the individual or with prin-

104. As stated, perhaps, Hegel is fairly characterized by Singer as "incredibly simple-minded," but if developed, I think that Hegel could show, as Don Locke has recently shown for example, that *all* plausible theories of universalization in ethics turn out to be trivial ("The Trivializability of Universalizability," *Philosophical Review*, 1968).

105. Nietzsche himself, of course, had other reasons besides; not so, perhaps, with most latter-day academic nihilists, for whom "nihilism" is not an ethical position but the absence of sound arguments for any ethical position.

ciples and their justification nor with that limited sense of “rationality” that philosophers before and after Kant have tried to foist on us.

The key to ethics and morality too, therefore, is what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*, a sense of ethical order and community that *precedes* articulation, whose practice is the basis for its justification (rather than the other way around), in

the life of the unity which permeates them, unalienated spirits transparent to themselves, stainless celestial figures that persevere in all their differences the undefiled innocence and harmony of their essential nature. (437)

The reappearance of ancient Greek tribalism is not at all hidden here, and Hegel even quotes *Antigone*;

They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting,
Though where they came from, none of us can tell.¹⁰⁶

The “tautology” re-emerges, not as a philosophical embarrassment, but as a new form of certainty;

It is not, therefore, because I find that something is not self-contradictory that it is right; on the contrary, it is right because it is what is right. . . .

By acknowledging the absoluteness of the right, I am within the ethical substance; and this substance is thus the *essence* of self-consciousness. (437)

c. Sittlichkeit and the Origins of Alienation (chapter 6)

There is a difference between arguments from and those to first principles. . . . *We* must begin with things known to *us*. Hence any one who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just . . . must have been brought up in good habits. For the fact is the starting point, and if this is sufficiently plain to him, he will not at the start need the reason as well; and the man who has been brought up well has or can easily get starting points. —Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Sittlichkeit is morality as established custom, not a set of principles. *Sittlichkeit* is shared activity, shared interests, shared pleasures; it is not first of all, and perhaps not at all, rational reflection on the rules. *Sittlichkeit* is found as “fact,” as Aristotle tells us; our moral principles are derivations, formulations, impositions upon the facts. This is not

106. *Antigone*, quoted in *PG*, 437.

to say that *Sittlichkeit* has no rules, or that the rules cannot be criticized or even rejected on rational reflection; but it is to insist that first there must *be* such rules and the practices in which they are embodied. Society is not, as in Hobbes and Rousseau, first of all a conference for the purpose of establishing the rules; society *is* that set of rules and practices. Their justification and legitimacy, the search for reasons, comes later, if at all. For the moment, "this is just the way it is done, and the way it has always been done." This is "the unmoved *ground* and *starting point* for the action of all, their purpose and goal" (439).

Chronologically, therefore, and also logically, the forms of consciousness that made up "Reason," in particular, "morality," already presuppose the existence of *Sittlichkeit*, and chapter 6 should *precede* chapter 5. But in terms of the dialectical argument, the reverse order is significant, for primitive *Sittlichkeit* in fact corrects the problems we have found in the preceding forms; the "alienation" of individual and society that Hegel diagnosed in his early writings and in his discussion of hedonism, the gap between individual feelings and universal laws that he discovered in Romanticism, the opposition of virtue and self-interest, the tension between the competitive but supposedly cooperative members of the "zoo" and the abyss between Kantian moral principles and the particular circumstances in which they are to be applied. In *Sittlichkeit*, pleasure is essentially shared pleasure and interests are essentially shared interests, action turns on right teaching and good judgment in particular circumstances, and cooperation is not a special circumstance but the assumed constitution of the group. As Aristotle tells us so clearly (and there is no doubt that it is ancient Greece where Hegel's ideal is to be found), the facts come first and we learn these long before we enter into philosophy and try to rationalize them. Indeed, Aristotle tells us, without good upbringing and familiarity with the practices first, there would be nothing to talk about in moral discourse. Kant's "rational autonomy" is a myth; it is a philosopher's invention, an apparatus that is supposed to operate in a social vacuum, and, consequently, has nothing to do.

The key to understanding *Sittlichkeit* is the notion of a *practice*.¹⁰⁷ A practice or set of practices might have a set of explicit rules (as in chess or music composition) but it need not have any such rules. What it does have is a set of success conditions—whether or not these are easily formulated—a set of examples that define what "doing well" consists in, and "doing poorly" too. There may be rules for surfing, horseback riding, singing rock-and-roll, burying the garbage, and

107. The analysis which follows owes much to Alasdair MacIntyre, in seminar and in *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1981).

kissing, but these are rarely if ever articulated as such, and when they are, it is usually in a somewhat belated attempt to correct a continuing error. What constitutes proper skiing technique, for example, is primarily one's proximity to certain examples and one's success in getting down the mountain vertically and in one piece. Indeed a "natural" skier might find him or herself completely unable to say anything of interest about "how" they do it or even "what" it is that they are doing. Yet there is no doubt that, whether or not there are formal rules (these are usually made up, somewhat arbitrarily and always derivatively, by olympic committees and other bureaucracies) anyone familiar with the practice would already know "good" from "terrible." Someone not so familiar, even armed with a detailed set of rules and checklists, would not know the difference. (Consider an American asked to evaluate his or her first cricket match, or bullfight, or Balinese cockfight.)

A practice, essentially, has a history. "This is the way it is done, and this is how it has been done." Not always, perhaps; one might know of a time when things were done differently, when horses were ridden without saddles and rock-and-roll was played without electronic amplification, but every practice is by its nature established as *given*, its ideal examples and implicit norms not easily open to question. One can challenge them, but only by assuming that they are already established to be challenged. "But we've always done it that way" is in itself a *prima facie* reason for continuing to do it that way in *Sittlichkeit*. (According to Kant's insistence on "rational autonomy," of course, it is no reason at all.) Though *Sittlichkeit* might often seem "irrational" to those on the outside (as if those on the outside counted for anything any way) it also provides the only basis for rationality that there is.¹⁰⁸ "Spirit," in other words, is quite properly the successor to "Reason" in the *Phenomenology*, for the latter presupposes the former, unreflectively, as *Sittlichkeit*.

Sittlichkeit is a set of practices, a way of doing things, with a history, without reflection, without question. Indeed, once the unquestioning, pre-reflective acceptance is broken, the legitimacy of *Sittlichkeit* is seriously threatened, for, using rationality alone, it is not at all difficult, as the Sophists showed in their daily debates, to reduce all maxims and laws to pointlessness (747), and even a Socrates, desperately searching for some rational absolute to re-establish them, cannot succeed (*ibid.*). Thus Aristotle insists that ethics turns first of all not on

108. Which is not to say, again, that there is not or cannot be any "rational" considerations which extend beyond a given community, or are even "universal." But there is no extra-ethical source of such considerations.

"the Good" but on right perception and good judgment (*phronesis*),¹⁰⁹ and that it is teaching and practice that make up morality, not mere ratiocination.¹¹⁰ Since a person is defined by his or her upbringing and place in society, the individual and individual pleasures and interests are themselves determined by the society. Nothing is more detrimental to the understanding of *Sittlichkeit* (except, perhaps, the Kantian ideal of rational autonomy) than the insistence that the legitimacy of its practices be justified by appeal to "extrinsic" rewards and individual self-interest.¹¹¹ Doing well in the established practice and being accepted as part of the group is itself the reward in question, and the very idea of "extrinsic" rewards already signals the fatal breakdown of *Sittlichkeit*.¹¹² Individual interests and group interests therefore coincide; personal virtue and the needs of the group are mutually defining, and what one "feels like doing" or "perceives as right" is always—in a coherent society—the same as what the moral rules—if there are any—demand.

The fact that *Sittlichkeit* may be unreflective does not mean—as strict defenders of the "rational autonomy" ideal sometimes suggest—that in such a primitive state there is no individuality. Quite the contrary; individuality is defined by the group and it is in distinct individuals that the practices and the solidarity of the group have their foundation (439, 444). But the individual as a function of the group is something other than the individual of hedonism or romanticism or rational autonomy; he or she is defined by roles, by duties, by expectations, by relationships, by status, by all of those interactions which bind a person to others, instead of those ephemeral pretensions of "virtue" and "the law of the heart," the self-defeating pursuit

109. *Ethics*, Book II, esp. ch. 9.

110. *Ibid.* Book II, esp. ch. 1.

111. MacIntyre illustrates "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" rewards by considering a child to whom we are teaching the game of chess. At first, we offer him or her rewards for correct moves; soon, we assume, he or she will take delight in simply *doing well* at the game; the former rewards are extrinsic, the latter are intrinsic rewards. Indeed, if the child never learned to recognize a good move, but only learned which moves to make in order to get an "extrinsic" reward (a piece of candy, etc.), we should probably say that he or she had not yet learned the game. So too, a tourist may have learned to behave—or not to behave—in certain ways in a foreign city, but insofar as the tourist is simply imitating behavior in order to stay out of trouble or enjoy the visit, we would surely say that he or she does not understand and is not part of this other society and its practices.

112. One can easily imagine Hegel providing an analysis of contemporary American society, in which it is all too generally conceded that people behave and obey the law largely to avoid punishment or to "get ahead," with little reverence for the integrity of society as such. ("What's in it for me?") But even to ask about one's personal stake is to signal the loss of *Sittlichkeit*, and this is so whether or not—what is palpably not the case—everyone's good would be maximized by the general obedience of the law and acceptance of the (legal) *status quo*.

of personal pleasure and the purely formal and uninformative dictates of "practical reason." Over and above not only each individual but all individuals too, there is *Sittlichkeit* itself, that set of traditions and the sense of "Spirit" that, though it does not exist apart from and is in no sense opposed to individuals, nevertheless has a status, if not an existence, of its own. Hegel makes this sound extremely mysterious, but in fact it is nothing more than the common observation that a sports team or a philosophy faculty or a nation in some essential sense continues to exist as such even when all of the individuals in it are replaced.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that *Sittlichkeit* is simply a happy "natural harmony." In fact, Hegel tells us, *Sittlichkeit* splits up into two opposed sets of laws, "human and divine" (445, 448–63). The human law is what we have been calling "practice," the established customs of a society, fully known, articulate when necessary, constitutive of individual roles and social status (447–48). The Divine Law, on the other hand, is "the simple and immediate essence of the ethical sphere" (449). The human law, Hegel tells us, is essentially the law of the state and the people (447–49); the Divine Law, however, is opposed to this and opposed to individuality ("individual being-for-self") as well (449). There is no question what Hegel has in mind here; it is an introduction to the breakdown of primitive *Sittlichkeit* through an inner conflict of laws, as exemplified in particular by Sophocles' *Antigone*. It is questionable, however, how well his analysis fits that play, and it is a dubious account of the forces of primitive tribal and family society. The interpretation, however, follows a familiar Hegelian fault line—between the finite (the limited practices of a circumscribed group) and the infinite (in this case, manifested by the family). The assumption is that the family, which is "the inner essence of *Sittlichkeit*" (450) has not only a "natural status" (as Rousseau, for example, had argued) but even a "divine" and eternal ontological status. The "New Right" in America as in Germany might well agree with Hegel's quasi-theological view of woman and family ("barefoot and pregnant" or "*Kirche, Küche, Kindern*"), for the fact is that here, more blatantly than anywhere else, Hegel has conflated cultural history and ontology—with sometimes offensive results.

HEGEL ON FAMILY AND FEMINISM (6, A, a.)

... the feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the Law of the Family is

an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from existence in the real world. (457)

The family represents an ideal for Hegel—as for Rousseau, not an ideal that can be intelligibly striven for in the modern state, perhaps, but nevertheless a model, embellished with nostalgia and no small amount of wishful imagery, by which all social relations might be tacitly measured. At least in certain societies (late 18th-century urban Germany among them) it is the mother who symbolizes that family feeling. There can be no doubt that Hegel sees the family as the cornerstone of society, the original locus and the source of education, in modern times, for children's entrance into civil society. He seems to give little attention to other alternatives—to Plato's suggestion that children be raised by the community, for example—and he calls the Roman law that children were to be considered property of their fathers “gangrene of the ethical order.”¹¹³ He does not suggest, as some modern fascists have suggested,¹¹⁴ that the state become, in effect, a monolithic extended family; but there can be no question that the family imagery of mutual affection, shared identity, and “immediate” unity—however much fact and however much fiction—is just as central to Hegel's thinking about *Sittlichkeit* as it was to much more neurotic Jean Jacques Rousseau's elaboration of the social contract.¹¹⁵

Sittlichkeit may be an ideal for Hegel, but not unreflective *Sittlichkeit*. The Greek *polis* was clearly not unreflective, and modern society, in any case, has no choice but to be reflective.¹¹⁶ Is reflective *Sittlichkeit* possible in modern society? It was possible for the Greeks, but only after centuries of conflict and effort. As Goethe says in *Faust*,

What from your fathers you received as heir,
Acquire, if you would possess it.

113. *Philosophy of Right*, 173–75, esp. 175 *Zusätze*. Hegel's only discussion of education here suggests that he thoroughly accepts the “childhood” theory of Rousseau and others, though he expresses his doubts about Schiller's “play” theory of education (175). The over-all image is the relationship between parents and children as simply one of “love” (173) and no other considerations enter into it. (Is it moot to remind ourselves that Hegel's mistress was currently several months' pregnant?)

114. Benito Mussolini, notably; see his “Doctrine of Fascism,” trans. I.S. Munro (Rome: *Enciclopedia Italiana*, 1934).

115. Rousseau's own fantasies about childhood are to be found in his *Emile* (1762) and, of course, in his *Confessions*. *The Social Contract* is strategically limited on such points.

116. This point was lost on John Stuart Mill, when in his *Utilitarianism* he argued that a pig satisfied could consider no other life, but Socrates, having experienced both the pig's pleasures and the pleasures of reflection, wisely chose the latter. In fact, Socrates had no more choice about his lost “innocence” than the pig had about the possibilities of becoming philosophically sophisticated by reading the *Meno*.

The established practices of the Greek community could become the *polis* of Aristotle only after the primitive *Sittlichkeit* of Greek tribal society had been broken and all but destroyed. The break, according to Hegel, came with *Antigone*—not the play but the symbolic event—the inevitable conflict of “natural” family ties with the increasingly impersonal laws of the state.

In fact, the breakdown of Greek tribal life has been explained by historians by reference to a dozen more tangible factors—the cost of the wars and the threat of the Persians, the rise of democracy and the coming of the philosophers. But Hegel is not particularly interested in history here, and what he is trying to provide is an allegory of inner conflict and a general account—using a particular fictional example of the breakdown of tribal society—in which family interests and societal interests are virtually the same, since tribal society is essentially nothing other than an “extended family.”¹¹⁷ One can ignore Hegel’s too predictable division of the laws into “human” and “divine” and render his point much more generally in modern terms: as society gets larger and more complex, the authority of the state or government (whatever its form) and the autonomy of the family are bound to conflict, and the *legal* statutes of society will contradict the *moral* obligations of interpersonal relationships. A Mennonite couple in Pennsylvania wish to raise their children without sending them to school, but state law intervenes, denying their autonomy in such matters and asserting its own legal authority. A law legitimately constituted makes duelling impermissible, but long-standing codes of family and personal honor demand a duel in certain circumstances. The law requires a young man to enter the army, but family morals proscribe killing for any reason. Creon commands that Polyneices remain unburied; family rules require that Antigone bury him. In all of these cases, it is not merely a matter of two antagonistic sets of rules, perhaps with two antagonistic groups supporting them; the conflict is in every case a potential *inner* conflict, a conflict between two equally valid commands within the individual who must choose between them. In this, *Antigone* could not be bettered as an example.

The problem is the nature and source of these conflicting laws, according to Hegel. One might argue that the division into “human” and “divine,” in addition to merely presenting once again the finite-

117. The phrase “extended family” already indicates what is wrong with the Hegelian analysis, as if the “natural” family consisted of that truncated minimal unit of mother-father-children, instead of the whole complex of kinship relations. Indeed, what Hegel considers “natural” might well be considered most *unnatural*, even in the context of modern society, and if he was looking for the sources of “alienation” he might better have started there, instead of his family fantasy.

infinite distinction, is a reproduction of an ancient fallacy in Plato—that since the mind has conflicting aspects, it must have different parts in which these aspects are embodied. Nothing could be less Hegelian, of course, but the separation of conflicting laws into two categories seems to suggest just such a move. Indeed, there are traditions not long removed from us that hold that it is family and inner morality that is strictly “human,” the laws of larger justice and morality “divine”; and there are other arguments in Hegel (in *the Philosophy of Right*, in particular) that would support this.¹¹⁸ A better interpretation, in my opinion, is to see the first stage in the argument as simply the inevitable split in the solidarity of *Sittlichkeit* as society begins to grow, regardless of where the fault lines of that split may be.

Before we go on to investigate what Hegel says about the breakdown of *Sittlichkeit*, however, it might be more profitable to look again at what he takes the nature of *Sittlichkeit* to be. In fact, the discussion in the *Phenomenology* is shockingly short (fewer than eight paragraphs). It is, we are told, Spirit, which has not yet recognized itself as such (439). It is, as Spirit, “self-supporting, absolute real being” (440); it precedes law and legality (442) and is “immediate truth” (441). And in more concrete terms, it is, first of all, as “a natural ethical community—the Family” (450). The family is the “element of the people’s actual existence” (*ibid.*); it is “*immediately* determined as an ethical being” (451). Here we recall Rousseau’s equally confident announcement at the beginning of *The Social Contract*,

The most ancient of all societies, and the only one that is natural, is the family; and even so the children remain attached to the father only so long as they need him for their preservation. As soon as this need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved. The children released from obedience owed to the father, and the father, released from the care he owed his children, return equally to independence. If they remain united, they continue so no longer naturally, but voluntarily; and the family itself is then maintained by convention.

The family then may be called the first model of political societies; the ruler corresponds to the father, and the people to the children; . . . the whole difference is that, in the family, the love of the father for his children repays him for the care he takes of them, while, in the state, the pleasure of commanding takes the place of the love which the chief cannot have for the peoples under him.¹¹⁹

Hegel too distinguishes between the family as a “natural” unit, held

118. *Philosophy of Right*, 257ff. In Rousseau, too, the social contract and the laws are divine (*Social Contract*, p. 237).

119. *Social Contract*, pp. 1–2.

together by bonds of "feeling" and affection, and political societies in which the union is rather in some sense "voluntary" or "conventional." If Hegel disagrees with Rousseau on the "independence" of individuals apart from the family and prior to the formation of society, he nevertheless gives the "natural family" its central role as the model of *Sittlichkeit*, the ideal and even "divine" pre-reflective social reality within which all other bonds take their initial form.

Hegel was not alone in his time thinking that the family was the eternal social entity, with "man and woman" as its divine ingredients. Indeed it was almost a platitude of the period that the family is an entirely natural and a timeless concept, that the ties between family members are not a matter of rules or morals but of "immediacy," that the "masculine and feminine" roles are somehow set by nature and fixed for eternity, that children are "naturally" the domain of the household and dependent on the family.¹²⁰ In fact, these concepts were invented in the 17th and 18th centuries; what Hegel describes as "Divine Law" is in fact the structure of bourgeois society at the turn of the 19th century. This is *not* to deny, of course, that male-and-female is a "natural" or biological unit in the most obvious sense or that there is some "natural" bond between parents and children that is not to be found, for example, in the founding of an industrial community in Northern Siberia by a group of strangers recruited from around the country. But what anthropologists call unsentimentally "kinship relations" are not to be confused with "family life" as described by Hegel and Rousseau. Bonds of love may be delightful (in Rousseau's case, a matter of mere fantasy¹²¹) but they are not the essence of the family. The household is primarily an economic unit—if we are talking about its genesis; family life in Greece, in particular, was far more a matter of politics and morality than of nature. (Aristotle, for example, talks most about the family when he is talking about "honor," and he does not speak of the family in terms of love or emotion at all.¹²²) What we call "the family" was a by-product of the urbanization and industrialization of society, when self-sufficiency of the household came to an end and smaller economic units were required

120. MacIntyre, noting Hegel's agreement with Adam Smith and David Hume on the supposed irrelevance of rules and considerations of justice within the family, comments "I can only conclude that they were never in families."

121. Rousseau sent his own five children to orphanages upon the death of their mother.

122. *Ethics*, Book I. On justice in the family, Aristotle comments that "there can be no injustice in an unqualified sense towards things that are one's own" (including children as property), Book V, ch. 6, p. 123. He too distinguishes political justice (under law) from household justice (with one's wife) but at no time does he analyze the latter in terms of such emotions as love and affection.

by circumstances—when production moved beyond the small group and itself became a function of the larger society. What we call “the family” is one of a number of small-scale social arrangements with sex and kinship as their basis, and Hegel has made the mistake of universalizing this particular arrangement as not only “natural” but eternal. The fact is that it is not “immediate” at all but rather the mediated structure of a particular kind of society.¹²³

This does not undermine the over-all argument of the *Phenomenology*, of course, but it does present us with an unusually clear warning—albeit late in the game—that Hegel’s dialectic is more than an odd mix of history and logic; it is sometimes a confusion of the two. The family in some minimal sense, a man and a woman mating to produce a child, may be “natural” in any sense, but it is not conceptually necessary; a female chimpanzee takes on every male in the group, and her children are not in the requisite sense part of what Hegel calls “family.” A woman might well mate with a series of males, with different males the father of different children, and the children might well become the heirs of the father (as in feudal society), the wards of the state (as in Sparta and *The Republic*) or the undifferentiated children of the group (as in an Israeli kibbutz and many primitive farming communities). I point this out simply to make it quite clear that the “natural” relations of a man and a woman, as a durable couple, their affection for their children and the children’s expected affection in return and, especially, the expected mutual affection between siblings of the same family, is not a matter of “nature” and much less of “logic.” It is a question of social arrangements, expectations, child-rearing practices and needs and, not least, conceptions of social roles regarding men, women, and children.

In fact, Hegel bases his ontology of *Sittlichkeit* not only on the notion of the (nuclear) family but on the specific conceptions of sex and status that now go along with it. The conception of childhood that is thought to be essential to the function of the family is a modern notion, in fact very much the conjuring of the imagination of unhappy Jean Jacques Rousseau—who imagined a childhood he thought he had missed. Infants and children are dependent and need to be educated, to be sure, but that distinctive period of “innocence” and irresponsibility which we call “childhood” and have managed in recent years to extend into the mid-twenties for brighter middle-class children is not to be found in most societies, and in particular not in Greece, where a “youth” may have been young and ripe for education

123. MacIntyre in seminar, Feb. 1980.

but in no sense a child.¹²⁴ But far more essential to the *Phenomenology* is the relevant relationships between men and women, both as a romantic couple and potential parents, and as brother and sister—which Hegel takes to be the ideal sibling relationship (456).¹²⁵

Hegel lists three different family-relationships that fall under the domain of “Divine Law”—husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters (456). With regard to the first and last, Hegel’s views of the relative roles of men and women are, by contemporary standards, disturbing. Yet they were, in his time, quite common, and some of his more offensive pronouncements are virtual paraphrases from Rousseau, for example, the separation and independence of the children (456). According to Hegel, women are strictly dependent and supportive, intuitive and the ethical essence of the family. Men, on the other hand, are more independent and rational. Women are passive, men are active, and so on. Years later (then married) Hegel wrote in the *Philosophy of Right*;

165. The difference in the physical characteristics of the two sexes has a rational basis and consequently acquires an intellectual and ethical significance. This significance is determined by the difference into which the ethical substantiality, as the concept, internally sunders itself in order that its vitality may become a concrete unity consequent upon this difference.

166. Thus one sex is mind in its self-diremption into explicit personal self-subsistence and the knowledge and volition of free universality, i.e. the self-consciousness of conceptual thought and the volition of the objective final end. The other sex is mind maintaining itself in unity as knowledge and volition of the substantive, but knowledge and volition in the form of concrete individuality and feeling. In relation to externality, the former is powerful and active, the latter passive and subjective. It follows that man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself so that it is only out of his diremption that he fights his way to self-subsistent unity with himself. In the family he has a tranquil intuition of this unity, and there he lives a subjective ethical life on the plane of feeling. Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind.¹²⁶

124. The view that childhood is in fact a significant episode in a person’s life, as opposed to various degrees of young adulthood, can be contrasted with Aristotle’s discussions, where children as such are mere “chattel” (*Ethics*, p. 123) and a youth becomes ethically relevant only after he is old enough to know the rules and begin the training, that will make him a citizen. The idea of a “happy childhood” would have struck a Greek as a bit of conceptual nonsense—one called a child “happy” only because of his potential for the future. (Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1100a3)

125. Cf. *Philosophy of Right*, 161ff and 167.

In the *Phenomenology*, virtually the whole emphasis is on the relation of brother and sister, which most commentators agree can be traced to Hegel's own emotional relationship with his sister Christiane.¹²⁷

Ad feminem accounts aside, Hegel's division of sexes has an ontological cast that is not to be dismissed. When he argues that women are intuitively ethical and devoted not to a particular brother or husband but to family as such (459), he is once again trying to provide an eternal justification for a social structure which was, even then, arbitrary and somewhat insupportable, based as it was on a society in which suddenly the labor of women was lessened and new time-consuming tasks had to be manufactured. (MacIntyre: "the invention of sewing, gossip and bad novels.") When Hegel argues self-congratulatorily that "the loss of the brother is . . . irreparable to a sister and her duty towards him is the highest," he is not just reminding Christiane to remember his birthday and setting up the *Phenomenology* for *Antigone*; he is also putting together the foundations of a role model which extends far beyond this one essential step in the dialectic. Indeed he leaves little doubt that it has become one of the essential structures of not only *Sittlichkeit*, but of the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is now, admittedly, a *male* odyssey.

We now have a happy if wholly false picture of *Sittlichkeit* in front of us, a man and a woman, much in love,¹²⁸ children who are also loved and, as brother and sister, love each other as well. The woman protects the family and the divine law; the brother reaches out to the larger community and "leaves this immediate, elemental and therefore, strictly speaking negative ethical life of the Family, in order to acquire and produce an ethical life that is conscious of itself and actual" (458). He enters the realm of "human law," and puts himself primarily under its domain. The woman stays behind in the immediacy and "strictly speaking, negative ethical life of the Family," subject primarily to the Divine Law (*ibid.*). It is sex, Hegel tells us, that determines the law. ("Nature, not the accident of circumstance or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law" (465).)¹²⁹

126. *Ibid.* 165–66.

127. Kaufmann *Hegel*, p. 143; Wiedmann, pp. 11–12.

128. I have not here broached the argument that "love" too is a distinctively modern notion (as of the 18th century in Europe) and an anthropological curiosity. I have argued this at length in my *Love* (New York: Doubleday, 1981). In particular, the concepts of "romantic love" and "brotherly love," far from being "natural," are taught to us only with the greatest of care, and any parent knows full well that the more "natural" affection between siblings, as Freud reminded the world, is as often homicidal as tender.

129. In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel summarizes his argument on Antigone as follows: For this reason, family piety is expounded in Sophocles' *Antigone*—one of the most sublime presentations of this virtue—as principally the law of woman, and as the law of a substantiality at once subjective and on the plane of feeling, the law of the inward life, a life which has not yet attained its full actualization; as the law of the ancient gods, "the gods of the underworld";

One important point that we have not yet broached concerning the nature of the Divine Law is the fact that it is primarily concerned with *death*. The realm of human law, which ultimately resides in the state, is concerned with welfare and happiness and other such finite trivia; the Divine Law, and therefore the family as such, is not concerned with well-being but rather with the dead (451). Now, on the one hand this is the perfectly reasonable suggestion (though by no means universal, as Hegel supposes) that *one* of the functions of the family is to remember its ancestry and respect the dead; but Hegel suggests something much more than this, even that this is *the* function of the family.¹³⁰ I would suggest that this is somewhat preposterous, but, again, we know what he is leading up to, a discussion of *Antigone* as the symbol of the opposition of the two laws with the precipitating incident the death of her brother. But to think of this as more than a limited illustration would be to exaggerate Hegel's illusions about family and, more seriously, misunderstand the all-important notion of *Sittlichkeit* itself, which is only tangentially a form of death and essentially a form of life.

ANTIGONE, "ALIENATION," AND "CIVIL SOCIETY" (6, A, b. & c.)

And yet the wise will know my choice was right . . .
I stand convicted of impiety,
The evidence of my pious duty done. —Sophocles, *Antigone*

The city state fails as a realization of the universal because its parochial nature contradicts true universality. —Charles Taylor, *Hegel*

The ideal of *Sittlichkeit* for Hegel was the Greek *polis*, with its "touch of the divine." But the unreflective *Sittlichkeit* of tribal Greek society, the society in which *Antigone* is set, is not yet the *polis* and, indeed, one question which should nag at us throughout our reading is the apparent absence of Hegel's ideal—the city-state of the short-lived Golden Age of early 5th-century Athens.¹³¹ In this ideal and exceedingly rare circumstance, the unity of the whole and individuality were

as "an everlasting law, and no man knows at what time it was first put forth." This law is there displayed as a law opposed to public law, to the law of the land. This is the supreme opposition in ethics and therefore in tragedy; and it is individualized in the same play in the opposing natures of man and woman. (166 *Zusatze*)

130. Findlay certainly reads him this way; "the Family exists to promote the cult of the dead" ("Analysis," p. 552).

131. G. Glenn Gray, *Hegel and Greek Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), esp. pp. 58–61, 63.

(at least arguably) in perfect harmony; the individual could not exist without the *polis*, and the *polis* could not exist without its individuals. This is not the brutal, primitive world of *Antigone*, in which Hegel freely admits that "might makes right" and the reflective wisdom and harmony of the *polis* is not at all in evidence. But then, *Antigone* is just a vehicle for Hegel's discussion of the break-up of tribal society and its development into a larger, disharmonious whole, the larger "zoo" of "civil society," (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) "a multitude of separate atoms" (476).¹³²

Hegel's actual discussion of *Antigone* in "Ethical Action" (Ch.6,A,b.) contradicts his affectionate projections of the preceding discussion, as does the actual text of the play. Hegel rendered the relation between brother and sister as one of love and family piety (457); but in the play, it is clear that her primary concern is her *duty*, her obligation to maintain the "divine" bonds of family;

CREON: . . . Did you know an edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE: Of course I knew . . .

CREON: So you chose flagrantly to disobey my law?

ANTIGONE: Naturally! Since Zeus never promulgated such a law. Nor will you find that Justice publishes such laws to man below. I never thought your edicts had such force they nullified the laws of heaven, which, unwritten, not proclaimed, can boast a currency that everlastingly is valid; an origin beyond the birth of man. And I, whom no man's frown can frighten, am far from risking Heaven's frown by flouting these.¹³³

It is not a private gesture of love but a public act of righteous rebellion:

ISMENE: . . . Remind ourselves that we are women, and as such not made to fight with men. For might unfortunately is right . . .

ANTIGONE: . . . go . . . and please your fantasy . . .

ISMENE . . . At least tell no one what you do . . .

ANTIGONE: . . . Oh tell it, tell it, shout it out!¹³⁴

Antigone must carry out the death ritual, not to soothe her sisterly conscience but in order to maintain kinship structures against the encroaching authority of the state, despite the fact that her brother is a traitor who has tried to overthrow the government. Hegel tells us:

Since the community only gets an existence through its interference with the happiness of the Family, and by dissolving self-consciousness

132. Esp. *Philosophy of Right*, 182–256. And in the Jena *Realphilosophie* lectures as well. I am again indebted to James Schmidt for his discussions of these topics.

133. *Antigone*, translated Paul Roche (New York: New American Library, 1958), II.910, 925–26, p. 179.

134. Ibid. 169.

into the universal, it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it an internal enemy—womankind in general. (475)

What is at stake for Antigone is the ultimacy of family bonds; what is at stake for Creon is obedience to his authority and a more impersonal sense of justice. This is not a conflict of two laws, “human and Divine”; it is a conflict of two priorities, two notions of justice, two sets of obligations, and two kinds of societies. *Antigone* signifies the end of family-tribal society; Antigone represents the losing battle against the breakdown of this most elementary and “natural” *Sittlichkeit* and the hegemony of “civil society”. (It must be remembered that Creon perishes too; there is no “synthesis” and reconciliation for the individuals caught in one of Hegel’s contradictions, only death. Spirit moves on, but they do not.¹³⁵)

In his discussion of the tragedy, Hegel insists that there is at first no conflict in *Antigone*, no “comic spectacle of a collision between duty and duty” or “passion and duty” (465) but rather her immediate “simple, pure direction of activity.” And yet, Hegel tells us, (466) the conflict *makes* her self-conscious, no longer merely implicit and inarticulate as in unreflective *Sittlichkeit*. *Action* makes inherent conflicts real.¹³⁶ It is here that Hegel makes his gratuitous ontological remarks that it is sex alone that determines one’s loyalties and obligations, but only a few paragraphs later he makes it clear that no one can escape allegiance to *both* sets of laws. Guilt is inevitable, whatever one’s sex and whatever one chooses. (The notion of “original sin” is evident here, not the Biblical variety but à la Jean-Paul Sartre; whatever you choose, the nature of the choice itself guarantees guilt and anxiety.¹³⁷) Guilt, Hegel says, haunts not just *Antigone*; it is common to her sex,

135. This is the locus of the classic confrontation between Kierkegaard and Hegel on “the existing individual” (in *Journals* of 1843 (trans. S. A. Dru, New York: Harper, 1948)) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (trans. W. Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944 p. 173.) Kierkegaard is correct that the resolutions of Hegel’s dialectic do nothing for the individual caught between two worlds, but Hegel never claims that it does. The individual, for Hegel, does not particularly count, and many individuals, he would admit, are lost in just this way. But this raises the question whether the concept of *tragedy* might be wholly missing from Kierkegaard’s own conception. See Pierre Mesnard, “Is the Category of the *Tragic* Absent from the Life and Thought of Kierkegaard”, in Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, *A Kierkegaard Critique* (Chicago: Regnery 1962), pp. 102–15. On the Greek view of the ethics of death, see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ch. 10 “The Virtues in Heroic Societies.”

136. Here too one thinks of Kierkegaard, in particular his version of the Abraham and Isaac story in *Fear and Trembling* (1843). The potential conflict between God’s command and ethical law does not become an actual conflict until Abraham actually is ordered to *do* something. The mere contradiction of two laws or two ways of life need cause no despair—so long as there is no need that actually brings about their confrontation. Hegel is not wholly consistent here, however.

137. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, esp. Part I, ch. 2, “Bad Faith.”

and, ultimately, to Creon (who is also destroyed by it) and the whole of the tribe, which is destroyed thereby also, to be replaced by something quite different. Moreover, it is not Antigone who explodes the harmony of primitive *Sittlichkeit*; her brother, remember, took up arms against the state, thus making it quite clear that all was not harmonious before she faced her own dilemma. Strangely enough, Hegel doesn't mention this.¹³⁸ Instead, he gives us his famous argument in favor of war—that

“war is the Spirit and the form in which the essential moment of the ethical substance, the absolute freedom of the ethical *self* from every existential form, is present in its actual and authentic existence.” (475)

In other words, in war the individual no longer counts and is dispensable, to be sacrificed to the state (“the ethical self”) as necessary.¹³⁹ Death, here in the discussion of *Antigone* and elsewhere too, plays a shockingly positive role in Hegel's philosophy, as the ultimate argument against the vanity of individualism. But yet, whatever unifying virtues war may have, civil war does not have those virtues, and it is civil war, the conflict of two kinds of society within one, that is at stake here. The inevitable end is “the ruin of ethical Substance” (476). What is left is “soul-less,” “a multitude of separate atoms” (475,476).

The official term for this shattering of society, of course, is “alienation” (*entfremdung*). We have met this term and the general idea of internal, destructive opposition all the way through the *Phenomenology*; in fact, the theme of the entire book, in one sense, is to overcome such “alienations”—the false separation of “subject and object,” the fraudulent distinction between “inner and outer,” and now, the tragic separation of individuals who, ideally, find their true identity only within a coherent, harmonious society. But it must not be thought that this new form of society is sheer anarchism, in any sense; it is in every way still a society, with organization and government, in which individuals find their place and their livelihood; what it lacks is *Sittlichkeit*, that is, allegiance to some “higher” existence, “the universal living Spirit” (479). This is *bourgeois society*, the political counterpart of the social “zoo” of chapter 5, a society in which the ultimate element is the individual person, reduced to a mere personality of an isolated self-consciousness within an organized conglomerate of such isolated self-consciousnesses, united only by an abstraction.

The section entitled “Legal Status” (Ch. 6,A,c.) is generally interpreted as the world of the Roman empire, in which citizenship is open

138. He talks around it in ¶473.

139. See also *PG*, 455, and *Philosophy of Right*, 324–26, 334–39.

to any individual who just happens to live within the far-flung borders of the empire.¹⁴⁰ Here there is no question of a shared *Sittlichkeit*, or even a shared language, shared customs, shared experiences. The unity is sheer abstraction, devoid of spiritual significance. In compensation for this massive alienation and loss of identity, the ethical concept of a “person” comes to take priority, with the equally abstract notion of “rights”—which have nothing to do with an individual’s talents or abilities or place in society. This characterization, however, reaches far beyond life in the Roman empire and, indeed, includes most Western societies ever since. What is key to personhood is property (cf. Hegel’s discussion of Kant in chapter 5, and more importantly, his discussion of property in the *Philosophy of Right*¹⁴¹) and property rights as primary rights (480). This is, of course, not far from a description of our own society, and it fits—far better than Rome—the realm of John Locke’s second *Treatise on Government* of 1689. Hegel’s attitude toward such a society is hardly flattering, in fact, he tells us

Consciousness of right . . . in the very fact of being recognized as having validity, experiences the loss of its reality and its complete inessentiality; and to describe an individual as a “person” is an expression of contempt. (480)

To compensate for this irreplaceable loss, Hegel suggests, we appeal to an arbitrary individual to run the state, which is now no more than a monstrous machine, whose virtues are efficiency and fairness but whose vices (inefficiency and unfairness) are often more in evidence (481). Hegel’s objection here is not to excessive governments and tyranny so much as to the primary loss of collective sensibility which requires such a state—even an enlightened and beneficent state. It is clear that Hegel is using as his model “the titanic self-consciousness” of a Tiberius or a Nero, who envisions himself as “the living God” but in fact is no one in particular (481). But the model would fit any modern government, our own included, and the idea that this leader is, in himself, “an unreal impotent self” would seem to point as much toward our modern electoral processes as to the chaos of poisonings and successions in 2nd-century Rome. The leader is as empty and insignificant as anyone else, and what is more, his power, coupled with his own lack of communal spirit, leads him to “lay waste everything” and “abandon his own self-consciousness” (482). One is reminded here of Rousseau’s characterization of the sovereign at the

140. *Philosophy of Right*, 80; see Findlay, *Hegel*, pp. 117–18.

141. *Philosophy of Right*, 189, 209–10, 217–18.

beginning of the *Social Contract*, where he distinguishes between the father who rules with love and the leader who enjoys "the pleasure of commanding." But insofar as the leader represents nothing higher than the individual citizen, no "richer or more powerful existence" (479) he provides his society with no meaning either, and the intended compensation of individual rights only results in ever more tragic "alienation," as everyone comes to see him-herself against the whole of the world, society itself as an alien and intrusive presence, and one's own empty self as everything (483).

Bourgeois society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) in the *Philosophy of Right* is defined as the state "as understanding envisions it," which is blind to the most essential aspects of what it is to be a member of a community and sees only the superficial ingredients—the exchange of goods protected by civil law and a system for ensuring something by way of the welfare of the common people.¹⁴² It is distinctively an achievement of the "modern world" in which there is "free reign of individual caprice and desire, that spectacle of extravagance and want" that Rousseau and Hegel viewed with disgust. In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel describes it as "that self-subsistent inherently infinite personality of the individual," "dawned in an inward form in the Christian religion and in an external form in the Roman world" (§185). The state is merely a "means" of individuals in pursuit of their own self-interest and civil society, therefore, consists solely in the satisfaction of personal needs and the administration of justice (§187–188). What is missing is *meaning*, and so it is that civil society inevitably passes over into the state (*Philosophy of Right*, §256).

The concept of "civil society" occupied Hegel from his earliest writings; it appears in a discussion of contracts in "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," but in the more traditional sense as a synonym for "the state".¹⁴³ The argument in the "Positivity" essay is the straightforward Enlightenment argument that contracts cannot apply to matters of faith, and thus he distinguishes the realm of civil society and the realm of faith, a crucial distinction in the section on Culture and the Enlightenment to follow in the *Phenomenology* (484–595). Later on, in the "Natural Law" essay and in the *Phenomenology*, he seeks a synthesis of the two, a resurrection of *Sittlichkeit* in the new world of Spirit reborn, in the wake of Napoleon (12). Indeed, in the *Philosophy*

142. Ibid. 183. I am indebted throughout this section to James Schmidt's detailed analysis of the concept of "civil society" in Hegel's thought; "A *Paideia* for the 'Bürger als Bourgeois'; the Genesis and Function of *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," *History of Political Thought*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1982).

143. Cf. Locke, *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, who also equates the two. In the *PG* they are already distinguished and in *Philosophy of Right* they are clearly at odds (185).

of *Right*, Hegel famously insists that "The march of God in the world . . . is what the State is."¹⁴⁴ Hegel seems to say explicitly that the realization of the State is also the fulfillment of God. In the Greek *polis*, of course, there was no disharmony or separation of religion and politics, and that is Hegel's ideal throughout.¹⁴⁵ But it is essential that such a religion not be "positive," for this would lead to ecclesiastical tyranny, and the state, accordingly, is not to be confused with "civil society." Indeed, again, the closest comparison is Rousseau, who defended the notion of an elemental civil religion in his *Social Contract*, which would be required of all citizens (and sanctioned by the death penalty).¹⁴⁶ Such extreme measures make sense only when one views how tragically far we have come, according to Hegel, from the harmonious ideal of the *polis*. In fact, the largest single segment of the entire *Phenomenology* is now dedicated precisely to showing how we have so "alienated" ourselves, elevating the finite ultimately empty individual personality and its rights to everything, and denying almost totally the entire realm of "Spirit" as such. Here, we can see the whole of Hegel's writings come together, his mixed attitudes toward religion and his doubts about the Enlightenment, his rejection of mere individualism and "civil society" and his diagnosis of the culmination of all of these "enlightened" conceptions—the Reign of Terror which followed the French Revolution, in 1792.

"CULTURE," THE ENLIGHTENMENT, AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION (6, B, I. & II.)

. . . Spirit constructs for itself not merely a world, but a world that is double, divided and self-opposed. . . it falls apart into a realm in which *self-consciousness* as well as its object is *actual*, and into another, the realm of *pure* consciousness which, lying beyond the first, is not a present actuality but exists only for Faith. (486)

Though he is never mentioned, there can be no doubt that the towering figure who dominates Hegel's conception of the Enlightenment is Kant. The "world of self-alienated spirit" is first of all Kant's division of human life into two realms—the world of knowledge and understanding, on the one side, the world of morality and religion and "practical reason" on the other. This was not, however, a universal

144. Ibid. 258 *Zusätze*; see also Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p. 73.

145. See H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 273–74.

146. ". . . the existence of a mighty intelligent beneficent divinity, possessed with foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract, and the laws" (*Social Contract* p. 237).

division throughout the Enlightenment, and for many of the French *philosophes*—Voltaire, for example—there was no division, only denial of the realm of “faith” and “pure consciousness” altogether. In this very long chapter, therefore, we should take some care to distinguish the different elements of the Enlightenment, the *Aufklärung* of Lessing and Mendelssohn, the critical philosophy of Kant, the more materialistic and atheistic criticism of the French, the sentimental speculations of Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the anti-Enlightenment writings of such figures as Herder and Jacobi. Indeed, harking back to Hegel's earlier essay “Faith and Knowledge,” we can be sure that the primary target of the whole of this section is that triad of mere finitude—Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi. In fact, it would not be a mistake to read the whole of this section, from the first references to Kant (484–87)—one passage quoted above—to the secularization of the two worlds (581) as Hegel's revision of his “Faith and Knowledge” essay of 1802.

Hegel often makes his criticism sound like a criticism of the Enlightenment as such, thus raising the question how he could so vigorously attack a movement of which he was so much a part. But it is not Enlightenment as such that Hegel attacks, only the division of the finite world of understanding and individual happiness as engineered by “civil society,” and the infinite world of cosmic comprehension, expressed usually in the overly Christian word “Faith.” Regarding that world of “Faith,” Hegel objects to the attempts of this strictly finite world of the understanding to intrude into the realm it cannot possibly understand—

It upsets the housekeeping of Spirit in the household of Faith by bringing into that household the tools and utensils of *this* world, a world which that Spirit cannot deny is its own, because its consciousness likewise belongs to it. (486)

Hegel's objection here is clearly aimed at Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*—and at Hegel's own early attempts to reduce religion to the domain of everyday morality—in which religion too is subjected to the critical scrutiny of Enlightenment and, inevitably, emasculated in the process. But it is clear that Hegel has no desire either to reinstate that “beyond” of the religious world or the world of the “thing-in-itself” with which Kant gives it ontological support. What he objects to is the complete refusal of the Enlightenment—and of Kant until his third *Critique*—to consider the place of humanity in the universe as a whole. Indeed, those who did think so cosmologically—Kant in his third *Critique*, Jacobi in his use of Kant's criticism—tended to deny us *knowledge* of this. This is what Hegel rejects

But in his enthusiasm, and because he is covering ground which he obviously wanted to retrace from the "Faith and Knowledge" essay, he takes as long to say this as it took him to present the whole of his epistemology and "Self-Consciousness" together. We will not attempt to treat it in so much detail here.

The world of self-alienated spirit (*Die Welt des sich entfremdeten Geistes*) is ostensibly concerned with the concept of *culture* (*Bildung*) but it is important to clarify the far from obvious relationship between this term and the concept with which we have tried to analyze the whole progression of the *Phenomenology* (chapter 4,b). "Culture" here is much more like our own word, with connotations of effete elitism and artificial sophistication. It is just that feature of society that Rousseau so devastatingly attacked as "corruption" and which the young German *literati* of 1800 inevitably associated with the French. "Culture," in this context, is not so much a matter of aesthetic appreciation as it is of *power*. Indeed, being "cultivated" is far more important than personality or talents; it is this alone that opens the doors to court privileges and the best drawing rooms in Paris and Berlin (489). "Good taste" is of extreme importance; whether consistent or reasonable is of no importance (491). Such elitism inevitably gravitates towards the center of power—the king—and there is again little doubt what specific reference Hegel has in mind—the court of Louis XIV, "the Sun King," and his strategic use of bourgeois talent and ambition to counteract the established power of the nobility (494). At the same time, this concentration of not only power but taste in the hands of state authority leads to doubt about the value of these public rewards of power and wealth (495–502). These doubts are resolved in "the noble consciousness" by means of dedication to the state, which of course earns one more rewards without the taint of selfish motives (503). What Hegel is doing here is half history, half Rousseauian social criticism; he is tracing the consolidation of power under the Bourbons (Louis XIV in particular) and the formation of the various "estates" in France. He is tracing the origins of (French) nationalism and exposing the hypocrisy of "state power" which, "in spite of its chatter about the *general* good, reserves to itself what suits its *own* best interest, and is inclined to make this chatter about the general good a substitute for action" (506). This is not a bad characterization of Louis XV ("*Après moi, le deluge*"), and the complementary characterization of the citizen as "always on the point of revolt" is not an inaccurate comment about France at mid-century. (In 1755 Lord Chesterfield wrote his son, "All the symptoms I have ever met with in history, previous to great changes

and revolutions in government, now exist, and daily increase, in France.")

As history, of course, Hegel is far too obscure to be worth reading, but his point, as always, is conceptual. What he is trying to depict here are the tribulations of "civil society" and its embarrassing attempts to create meaning for itself in the strictly "finite" concerns of social status. Much of the section is devoted to the place of *language* in this personal debasement (508, 511–13) in which speech is no longer *expressive*, which is its primary function (*à la* Herder and Rousseau), but is strictly functional and impersonal, as in the discourse of the court and the flattery due one's superiors. This flattery in turn creates the self-delusion of superiority, and in the absence of any more spiritual values the pursuit of wealth becomes primary for both king and court (512–17). This further increases the power of the monarchy insofar as it is the monarchy that consolidates wealth and status, but it is strictly impersonal status, and ultimately without significance. This leads to a new bout of rebelliousness (517) and arrogance (519) and one can here picture Voltaire exercising his formidable wit in the court of Louis XV and in the drawing room of the king's mistress, the equally formidable Madame de Pompadour. Indeed, the literature of the French *philosophes* is here much in evidence, particularly Diderot's sarcastic parody, *Rameau's Nephew*, which Hegel generously absorbs into his own prose. The irony of wit exposes the false values of the times, much as Socrates and the Sophists used their own form of ironic comedy to explode the hollow maxims and laws of Greece in its period of decay. (Cf. 746, in the chapter on "Religion.") It is at this point that Rousseau clearly enters the picture as "the plain mind" which adopts the "wisdom of Nature" (523). But Hegel clearly takes Voltaire's position (in fact Rousseau's position too) against simple-minded primitivism:¹⁴⁷

... if the demand [for the dissolution of this world of perversion] is directed to the universal *individuality*, it cannot mean that Reason should give up again the spiritually developed consciousness it has acquired, should submerge the widespread wealth of its moments again in the simplicity of the natural heart, and relapse into the wilderness of the nearly animal consciousness, which is also called Nature or innocence. (524)

147. See especially Arthur Lovejoy, "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 14–37. Cf. Voltaire's unfair but eminently quotable reply to Rousseau: "I have received sir, your new book against the human race . . . the reading of your book makes us want to creep on all fours. However, as it is more than sixty years since I lost that habit. . . ."

Or in Rousseau's own words, "we cannot go back"—that is, back to primitive innocence or unreflective *Sittlichkeit*, nor can we return to that strictly individual "law of the heart," which we rejected so many pages ago (367–80). But then, where does one go? What happens to the Enlightenment when it faces such cultural degradation and "corruption"? It turns, at least in Germany, to religion, to "Faith and Pure Insight" (527–37). Chronologically, it would be absurd to interpret these passages as Christianity as such, despite the cross reference to "Unhappy Consciousness" (528) and to the Trinity (532–33). This is a portrait of that strictly defensive religion that found its uncomfortable place in the Enlightenment, in Jacobi and Lessing in particular and in the view that all religions are essentially the same, or they are steps on the way to the same ultimate truth. True religion is a single "pure insight" underlying all religions, but this "pure insight" turns out not to be religion at all, since religious belief cannot be all things at once (538–40). Against the Enlightenment view, it must be urged that it is the *particular content* that counts in religion (537) and not a universal insight. For this reason, Hegel will later (chapter 7) reject religion too. But now, he returns again to the spirit of the times, to the Enlightenment, both to repeat his now tiresome criticism of its shallow finitude and lack of spirit but also to praise "the truth of enlightenment"—that "heaven is transplanted to earth"—which is no small point of agreement. Hegel's realm of Spirit may be infinite but it is also earth-bound.

The Enlightenment was many things—the spirit of criticism, a powerful reform movement, the ambitiousness of the middle class, the end of feudalism, a new sense of religious tolerance, a literary and artistic epoch, a period of political upheaval.¹⁴⁸ But Hegel is concerned here primarily with only a single dimension of this great movement—its attitude toward religion. In fact, it is simply absurd to say "its attitude," for the Enlightenment had almost as many attitudes as it had spokesmen. Baron d'Holbach was an uncompromising atheist; Voltaire accepted a minimal God but despised the church ("I'm tired of hearing how it took only twelve men to establish Christianity; I would like to show that one can destroy it"). Rousseau incorporated a minimal set of religious beliefs (including belief in the Supreme Being) into his ideal State. Kant defended Christianity as a pair of "postulates of practical reason" while Lessing and Mendelssohn de-

148. See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Vintage, 1966), and also ch. 1 of my *History and Human Nature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

fended a far more tolerant conception of "true religion" which included other faiths too, Judaism especially. To write simply of "the Enlightenment", therefore, especially given Hegel's detailed knowledge of its various approaches to religion, is somewhat irresponsible, to say the least. And indeed, his account shows the strain of these many variations.

The various modes of the negative attitude of consciousness, the attitude of scepticism and that of theoretical and practical idealism, are inferior shapes compared with that of *pure insight* and its diffusion, of the *Enlightenment*. (541)

In terms of what it attacks, however, the Enlightenment does display remarkable unity; it opposes the church and the priests, who manipulate the general masses with *superstitions* (542). Authority and superstition are as much the target of Kant and Lessing as of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Holbach. The notion of "pure insight" or what Descartes called "the natural light of reason" is the Enlightenment antidote to superstition. If only people would be rational instead of gullible, in other words, the power of the priests would be broken. "By this simple means "pure insight" will clear up the confusion of this world" (54).

Hegel has no objection to the Enlightenment attack on "superstition"; but the question is what is to count as superstition. The reliance on "pure insight" has that singular flaw that we have seen Hegel expose again and again in the *Phenomenology*, in "Sense-Certainty" and "Self-Certainty," in the cosmic insight of the Stoics and the self-righteous virtue of Romanticism—namely, *it has no determinate content*. The Enlightenment critic exposes the objects of religious faith as mere fabrications, but is it not the case that the self-certain reason of the Enlightenment is just as much a fabrication and a "superstition" too? Thus Enlightenment criticism tends to dismiss the religious consciousness for having irrational beliefs instead of recognizing religion for what it is, some sense of one's own spiritual identity and cosmic significance (548–53). Enlightenment criticism often takes Christianity, for example, to be nothing more than the belief in a certain implausible historical event (on the basis of evidence poorer than most newspaper accounts (554), Hegel quips). But religious faith is not in need of "evidence" or "proof"; "it is Spirit itself which bears witness to itself, both in the *inwardness* of the *individual* consciousness and through the *universal presence* in everyone of faith in it" (554). (Not even Kierkegaard sounds so much like Kierkegaard, and the anti-Hegelian Dane would no doubt be surprised to realize how much his

antagonist anticipated his views.¹⁴⁹) Indeed, it is only when pressured by the Enlightenment critics for “reasons” that the religious consciousness began to stumble on admittedly inadequate arguments. In religious *Sittlichkeit* (“folk-religion”) no arguments had ever been necessary.

Here Hegel again repeats his criticism of Enlightenment empiricism for its reduction of all experience to sense-experience, of the Absolute to its sensuous properties (557–58), of all ethics to its narrow ethical standard of “utility” (559–62). From the point of view of faith, he concludes, this attitude is an “abomination” and “utterly detestable” (562). The so-called “wisdom” of Enlightenment consists of nothing but platitudes (*ibid.*) and utility omits any sense of value beyond mere pleasure; *this* is what Hegel criticizes as the finitude of Enlightenment in “Faith and Knowledge,” and it is not to be thought that the alternative need be anything so elaborate as the religious consciousness of Christianity. Indeed, he now plays off “Faith” against Enlightenment as *complements*, the former providing the absolute vision (“the Concept”) that the latter lacks, and Enlightenment correcting the fatal flaw of religious consciousness—namely, taking the Absolute to be something outside of itself (563–66). Both faith and Enlightenment make the mistake of separating the finite and the infinite, the merely sensuous, useful, and pleasurable from the all-encompassing concept of the cosmos itself (567), and Hegel’s aim is to break down this division between the banal and the cosmic which is the source of the disagreement. He comments that Enlightenment must be made to appreciate the fact that religious sacrifices, whether a day of fasting or giving one’s life, are not “purposeless” but symbolically meaningful (570–71). There are desires that go far beyond mere needs and pleasures, which mere utilitarianism refuses to see.¹⁵⁰ But it is Enlightenment in turn that makes possible a renewal of faith, by bringing it down to earth and illuminating “that heavenly world with ideas belonging to the world of sense” (572). Enlightenment alone, Hegel concludes, is stuck with “an unsatisfied yearning” which it cannot even recognize, condemning “its individual self to an empty and unfulfilled beyond” (573). But, however harsh Hegel’s criticisms—

149. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, esp. p. 180ff.

150. The vulgar utilitarian here would be Hume, who did indeed criticize religion in general as nothing more than childish superstition and fears and held up a straightforward criterion of “utility” as the only measure for human actions. Contrasted with him would be J.S. Mill, who tried desperately to introduce the notion of “quality” of pleasures to encompass just such transparently anti-utilitarian gestures as ascetic self-sacrifice. (Nevertheless Nietzsche, very much in the German Spirit, later accuses Mill of “vulgarity” as well.)

Enlightenment will rid itself of this blemish; a closer examination of the positive result which is its truth will show that in that result the blemish is in principle already removed. (Ibid.)

Thus we reach "the truth of Enlightenment" (574–81), a truth which Enlightenment has already pointed out in criticism of the religious consciousness, namely, that its putative object of reverence is in fact its own creation. And this is the truth—that the Absolute is indeed one's own self-consciousness, which Hegel explicitly attributes to Descartes, "that being and thought are, *in themselves*, the same" (578).¹⁵¹ Hegel even eases his attack on the banality of "the Useful," so long as this notion is expanded to include the whole realm of practical reason, instead of the petty interests discussed by the utilitarians. What "Faith" lacked was any sense of its own reality; the principle of utility, broadly conceived, at least has the virtue of being "certain of its individual self." Here again we find the shift that marked the transition from mere "Understanding" to "Self-Consciousness" in the Fichtean notion of the pragmatic. Thus Kant's two worlds were united into Fichte's singular world of moral action, and now Hegel tells us, with regard to faith

The two worlds are reconciled and heaven is transplanted to earth below. (581)

"ABSOLUTE FREEDOM AND TERROR" (6, B, III.)

If we have to choose between an excess of patriotic zeal and the empty shell of bad citizenship, or the morass of moderatism, we will not hesitate. —Robespierre

Let us not be afraid to repeat it, we are farther from freedom than ever; for not only are we slaves, but we are slaves legally, as a consequence of the perfidy of our legislators, who have become the accomplices of a rehabilitated despotism . . . —Marat

There is no question what the section on "Terror" refers to, but once again, Hegel's history is far more obscure than informative. As a student, Hegel was, like most of his friends, enthusiastic about the French Revolution and, like most of his friends, he was appalled when the turmoil in France, apparently stabilized in the National Assembly, took an extremely violent turn in 1792, beginning with the execution of the king and the establishment the following year of the first modern

151. Cf. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 228, where Hegel makes the same (dubious) claim for Descartes.

dictatorship. The dictator was Robespierre, and it would not be an overstatement to say that Hegel despised him.¹⁵² But at the same time, from the security of retrospect, Hegel clearly recognized that Robespierre was as much a victim of circumstances as anyone else. Far from wielding the awesome power of the revolution, he too was being used, would be swept away and destroyed by it.

The section of the *Phenomenology* is not *about* Robespierre, of course, but he dominates it from the opening references to his hero Rousseau and the "general will" (584) to the cult of the "Supreme Being", founded in 1794 by Robespierre in accordance with Rousseau's own dictates in the *Social Contract*. Robespierre is clearly the individual at the head of government who can be easily replaced (591), and I take it that the reference to "Being suspected" in the same paragraph is the infamous "Law of Suspects" of 1793.¹⁵³ Robespierre, a bourgeois lawyer, inevitably turns against "the people" (the working class, the peasants, the "sans culottes") when the street violence gets out of hand (593). Finally, the revolution changes "round in its inner concept into absolute positivity" (594), in other words, dictatorship (first Robespierre, then Napoleon). But just as we are ready for some philosophical insight into this classic turn from revolution to mob rule to authoritarianism, the subject matter changes again, abruptly. Having left Robespierre on the guillotine, we now find ourselves once again talking about "Morality." Why?

To make sense of this most curious transition, I suggest that what Hegel has done is not pursue his subject through its actual vicissitudes (the fall of Robespierre, the shaky stability of the *Directoire*, the rise of Napoleon) but rather, with a simple shift in perspective, he leaves France at the height of the Terror and moves back to Germany, where Kant was establishing his own revolution, in particular, with

152. He makes his opinions known, for example, in a private Christmas 1794 letter. He discusses Robespierre more ambiguously and opaquely in the Jena "Philosophy of Spirit" lectures.

153. September 17, 1793, "The Law of Suspects":

"1. Immediately after the publication of the present decree all the suspect-persons who are in the territory of the Republic and who are still at liberty shall be placed under arrest.

"2. These are accounted suspect-persons: 1st, those who by their conduct, their connections, their remarks or their writings show themselves the partisans of tyranny or federalism and the enemies of liberty; 2d, those who cannot, in the manner prescribed by the decree of March 21st last, justify their means of existence and the performance of their civic duties; 3d, those who have been refused certificates of civism; 4th, public functionaries suspended or removed from their functions by the National Convention or its commissioners and not reinstated, especially those who have been or shall be removed in virtue of the decree of August 14th last; 5th, those of the former nobles, all of the husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, and agents of the Émigrés who have not constantly manifested their attachment to the revolution; 6th, those who have emigrated from France in the interval from July 1, 1789, to the publication of the decree of March 30–April 8, 1792, although they may have returned to France within the period fixed by that decree or earlier."

his *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*. Accordingly, we will come back to that in a moment, with "Spirit" [once again] Certain of Itself."

We have said very little about *freedom* during the course of our discussion of "Reason" and "Spirit." In fact, the only attention we have given to "freedom" in our discussion of the entire book is in the wholly non-political section on "Stoicism, Skepticism and Unhappy Consciousness," where "freedom" emerges as an evasive illusion, an attempt to escape from the hardships of life, a purely *negative* freedom. That is what we find here too, a purely negative freedom, but in this instance, "absolute freedom" pertains not to individuals but to "the people" as a whole.¹⁵⁴ Thus the meaning of "freedom" is no longer, as in Rousseau's second *Discourse*, "independence from other people"; it is rather the concept to be found in Rousseau's *Social Contract*, in which freedom is ultimately a property of society, rather than individuals. It is "negative" in the sense of freedom *from restraint*, but also in the sense that it is wholly destructive, which is not to say, however, that it does not serve an essential role in the dialectic. The terror at least plays the same function in modern life that war and systematic violence have always played, to remind the individual of his or her dispensability vis-à-vis the state, to assert the ultimate reality of society and "the people," in place of the alienated individualism and utilitarianism of the Enlightenment.

Hegel suggests several different arguments here, all of them unusually abstract for the subject matter. We can ignore here the usual accounts of "the second revolution"—the growing differences between the very different interest groups that made up "the people" (more formally, "the third estate,") the likelihood of foreign invasion and a counter-revolution by displaced aristocrats and clergy, the travesty that was called "the National Assembly," and the subversive vitriol of extreme radicals like Marat.¹⁵⁵ The Terror for Hegel had to be seen as a conceptual development, first, from the Enlightenment concept of "utility" taken to its extreme, second, of the intrinsically destructive orientation of this notion of "freedom," and third, the assertion of the general will against all individuality.¹⁵⁶ What Hegel does not argue here is what we might most expect him to argue, that in-

154. For an extensive discussion of Hegel's notion of "freedom" here, see Richard Schacht, "Hegel on Freedom," in MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel*, pp. 289–328.

155. See, for example, R.R. Palmer, *The World of the French Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) and his *Age of Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969–70).

156. I have developed a somewhat different ideological interpretation of the vicissitudes of the revolution in *History and Human Nature*, ch. 5.

dividualism as such, and the inordinate emphasis on individual rights above all else, ultimately emerges in a kind of bloody anarchism, a neo-Hobbesian war of "all against all." But this is what the revolution was not, however much chaos and small-scale anarchy there may have been in the streets of Paris. "The Terror" was "the people" and not mere individual thuggery. "The Terror" was "Spirit" unleashed, asserting itself absolutely and without regard to cost.

The first argument is obscure and ostensibly confused, but it seems to be this: as we increasingly emphasize "utility" we tend to lose our hold on "objectivity" and all that counts is usefulness. But the notion of usefulness is itself indeterminate when specific ends are not specified and this lack of determination is what Hegel calls "absolute freedom" (582–83). He then immediately turns to Rousseau and more or less paraphrases the main arguments of the *Social Contract*: the world consists of the "General Will" of the people, which cannot be represented and is to be found in every citizen (584). The notion of "utility" gets lost here, as Hegel begins to discuss (cryptically) the tenuous alliance of different social groups under a single auspice ("the third estate") in which all distinctions of rank and privilege are done away with (585). And in case we were still looking for it, the concept of "utility" is said to disappear, as it did indeed in the moralizing of Rousseau—and Robespierre (586);

We desire to substitute in our country, morality for egoism, honesty for mere honor, principle for habit, duty for decorum, the empire of reason for the tyranny of fashion, contempt of vice for scorn of misfortune, pride for insolence, large-mindedness for vanity . . . ¹⁵⁷

The second argument is more straightforward: the "absolute freedom" of the revolution was essentially the destruction of classes, privileges, ranks, and distinctions, but once this has been done, it continues its destructive activities within itself, destroying individuals and *all* distinctions because it does not know how to do anything else (585–90). Indeed, the success of the revolution in its initial aims was completed by the end of the summer of 1789, with the meeting of the Estates-General.¹⁵⁸ The rest was aftermath, like the various settling and spontaneous eruptions following a brief earthquake. Indeed, Kant used the events of 1789 and the turning of power to the people as a

157. Robespierre, "Definition of the Goals of the Revolution" (Feb. 5, 1794). See also, T.M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), and G. Rude (ed.), *Robespierre* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

158. The meeting of the Estates General already signified the electoral power of the Third Estate (by having equal voting power to the Clergy and Nobility) and represented even in the King's eyes the transfer of the organ of power to what would soon become (by the end of the summer) "the National Assembly."

rationalization for the whole of the revolution, including the execution of the king, activities which, in principle, he ought to have abhorred.¹⁵⁹ But Hegel's argument here is simple and full of cautionary advice: a revolution is intrinsically negative, but once its goals have been fulfilled, it cannot then be turned around to do positive work. In Carlyle's famous phrase, "it cannot stop, till all the fuel is done."¹⁶⁰

The third argument is most important, however, for it is here that we can see along with Hegel the positive feature of the revolution, despite its destructive manifestations. In the terror-filled assertion of "the people" as "Spirit" against alienated individuality, Hegel sees the real self-assertiveness of Spirit, not in the abstract "General Will" of Rousseau, but its positive assertion of the *moral* will. It is not the formal apparatus of the categorical imperative (which Hegel rejected at the end of "Reason") but the final, more "speculative" aspects of Kant's (and Fichte's) practical philosophy.

As the Enlightenment moves away from the banality of "utility" and adopted the more spiritual ideals of Rousseau and radicalism, it thereby abandoned its primary concern with individual human happiness, and, not surprisingly, the later days of the French revolution resembled nothing so much as a religious civil war. Thus Crane Brinton also writes,

Robespierre survived because the terror was in large part a religious movement, and Robespierre had many of the qualities of a second-rate religious leader.¹⁶¹

In the realm of "absolute freedom," the world is pure will, and the will is in every person as well as in the whole (584). But the only results of absolute freedom are negative and "the *fury* of destruction" (589). The Absolute (as freedom) can prove its total independence only in the same way that (in an earlier section) the state could prove its ultimate authority—but sending to death or putting to death its own citizens (590). Hegel has a grisly allusion to the guillotine here:

It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage . . . (Ibid.)

But in this destruction, the spirit of absolute freedom does indeed discover what it truly is; the spirit of the whole in which all individuals and distinctions are ultimately secondary. This "negative essence" of

159. Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

160. Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York: Dutton, 1955).

161. Crane Brinton, *A Decade of Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1934), p. 108. Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), p. 206.

self-destruction turns around in the positive confidence of morality, the concrete "Will" of Kantian morality (592–94). The final realization of Spirit, in other words, will have to come about in Germany, not in so "immature" a people as the French. (This particular insult was so stated by Schiller, but most of his countrymen, in their new chauvinism, would have agreed wholeheartedly.)

*d. "Spirit Certain of Itself":
The Postulates of Practical Reason (6, C.)*

While the French bourgeoisie, by means of the most colossal revolution that history has ever known, was achieving domination and conquering the Continent of Europe, . . . the impotent German burghers did not get any farther than "good will" . . . Kant's good will fully corresponds to the impotence, depression and wretchedness of the German burghers, whose petty interests were never capable of developing into the national interests of a class [but] had their counterpart in their cosmopolitan swollen-headedness.
—Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

The revolution in Germany was Kant's philosophy. Not for the German intellectuals was the threat of prison and the guillotine, nor even the censure of the state. As Lessing once said, "freedom" in "Old Fritz's"¹⁶² Prussia consisted of "the freedom to advertise as many anti-religious imbecilities as you wish," but most of the German philosophers were not even willing to risk this minimal, undependable freedom. (See the following chapter, "The Secret of Hegel.") They avoided politics and disguised even their unorthodox religious views in opaque discussions about "Practical Reason" and Kant's obscure but eminently respectable jargon. So what emerged from these discussions was a sense of virtue that, on the face of it, seemed as unobjectionable as it was politically impotent—the concept of *morality*.

It might seem to the reader that we have been over this ground before. Indeed, what were we talking about in chapter 5 if not Kant's moral theories? But our topic there was "rational autonomy" and its formal results and criterion—the categorical imperative. What concerns us here is rather the broader moral picture in which that formal moral theory is embedded. Individual "rational autonomy" is not the issue of morality as such, and the whole discussion of Kant can be turned around; instead of reading Kant in terms of the individual

162. I.e. Frederick the Great.

formulating universal moral laws, one can understand Kant as the recognition of a universal moral community ("the kingdom of ends"¹⁶³) in which every individual is defined by the moral law. We also recognize this as the essence of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, that the moral consciousness is not merely an individual particular consciousness but a *universal* consciousness, "the consciousness of this law which . . . forms the basis for the intuition of self-activity and freedom."¹⁶⁴ Hegel describes it as

immediately present to itself in its substance . . . this immediacy which is its own reality . . . the immediate [as] being itself, and, as pure immediacy purified by absolute negativity, it is being in general, or all being. (597)

In his earlier essays "Faith and Knowledge" and "Natural Law," Hegel treated Kant and Fichte together as the theorists of "formal morality" and "Practical Reason." The crucial point to his interpretation here, accordingly, is that both of them—whatever their differences—hold that the moral consciousness is a universal consciousness, purged of everything particular and empirical and literally identical in everyone. Indeed, in both Kant and Fichte, though with very different metaphysical twists, it is asserted that the moral self-consciousness is indeed reality "in itself"¹⁶⁵ (597), not only the form of freedom but its content as well (598). Hegel comments that this consciousness is both immediate and mediated—immediate in the Fichtean sense that one knows oneself by "intuition" as "an immediate consciousness derived from no other"¹⁶⁶ and mediated in the Kantian sense that one does not merely pick up one's moral principles from surrounding unreflective *Sittlichkeit* but through rational understanding of one's duty. Summarizing the whole of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* in two sentences, Hegel tells us

Into its conscious will all objectivity, the whole world, has withdrawn. It is absolutely free in that it knows its freedom, and just this knowledge is its substance and purpose and its sole content. (598)

Nature, in other words, is no longer viewed as "external" but becomes the stage on which we exercise and prove our moral consciousness.

163. Kant, *FMM*, pp. 433ff, 438ff.

164. Fichte, *Wiss.*, p. 41.

165. For Kant, the moral self is "the self-in-itself," as opposed to the empirical self of experience and the transcendental self of knowing. For Fichte, the self is quite literally everything, but he denies what Kant generally refers to as "the thing-in-itself"—that is, objects "outside of us." On the essential nature of the self-in-itself, however, they are in perfect agreement. What they would disagree about (violently) is whether this self is also the self which "constitutes" ("posits") the world of nature. For Kant, it is not; for Fichte, it is.

166. Fichte, *Wiss.*

We have been through this before, of course, in a more primitive way at the beginning of chapter 4 and at the beginning of chapter 5 too, but we have repeatedly warned against viewing the *Phenomenology* as a covert sequence of particular thinkers. Fichte—or different aspects of Fichte's thinking—appear throughout the *Phenomenology* and, even more so does Kant. Indeed, there are fewer chapters that do not have a Kantian constituent than do, whether or not they are, like the present section, so obvious.

"The Moral View of the World" is essentially a treatment of Kant and Fichte, but this raises once again the question of the over-all structure of the *Phenomenology*. If we read the first part of chapter 5 as Schelling's identity-philosophy, then in that sense, we must ask, are Kant and Fichte, whom Hegel had attacked in Schelling's defense only a few years before, "higher" on the dialectical ladder than Hegel's friend? The answer is, again, I think, that these various sequences are not to be taken as an ascension but rather as various roads along a cosmic phenomenological panorama, the sum total of which adds up to an all-encompassing view of the whole. The present section, in one sense parallel to the "Individuality" discussion of Kant's morality but in another sense quite distinct from it, fits what Hegel takes to be an utterly central place in that panorama—as a truncated but yet agreeable view of the Absolute, from which he (and Schelling) could make the few final steps.¹⁶⁷

"The Moral View of the World" (599–615) is in fact concerned with *two* views of the world—the view one has of the world *qua* moral agent, and the view one has of the world as observer of nature. Indeed, it is the very essence of Kant's and Fichte's philosophy that these be not only distinct but in some sense opposed, since it would make no sense to speak of moral "oughts" if the world (of nature) were not other than the way things *ought* to be (599). In Kant, the distinction between the two worlds (or two "standpoints") is an elaborate distinction between faculties of reason and the consequent realms they constitute; in Fichte, the opposition between the moral consciousness (self) and nature (non-self) is precisely *in order to* provide a stage for moral activity. For Fichte, consciousness of one's duty (*Pflicht*) is taken to be "the essential fact" and nature is "completely devoid of independence and essential being." In other words, it is strictly supportive of the moral consciousness, not, as in Kant, an independent realm of its own. In Kant, however, the independence of nature is both independent and "indifferent" to our moral concerns—at least in the realm

167. *Differenz*-essay of 1801, on Fichte's System, pp. 119ff.

of the second *Critique*; since “the only thing that is good without qualification is a good will” (i.e. a well-intending consciousness), it is only the intention, not its consequences in nature, that count—

Even if it should happen that, by a particularly unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provisions of a stepmotherly nature, this will should be wholly lacking in power to accomplish its purpose, and even if the greatest effort should not avail it to achieve anything of its end . . . it would sparkle like a jewel in its own right, as something that had its full worth in itself.¹⁶⁸

But for Kant too, nature is without “essential being” insofar as it is mere appearance or “phenomenon”; morality and the moral consciousness are real. Thus a conflict develops in Kant—which Fichte tried to resolve in a one-sided way—between viewing nature as independent and in itself essential vis-à-vis the moral consciousness and nature as dependent and inessential. It is a conflict that can be made more evident to us independently of the technical considerations of Kant’s “faculty” philosophy if we think of the following kind of query—“to what extent is it necessary that our (good) intentions *actually* have an effect in the world?” What if—like Dostoyevsky’s Prince Mishkin in *The Idiot*—our every good intention were to turn into a disaster, would that not undermine our moral goodness, despite our intentions? What is the difference between having good intentions and making a mere wish for the good, devoid of action? Or as Hegel puts it, what if the moral consciousness

finds cause for complaint about such a state of incompatibility between itself and existence, and about the injustice which restricts it to having its object merely as *pure duty*, but refuses to let it see the object and *itself* realized. (601)

On the one hand, the very notion of moral consciousness requires that the world *not* always conform to its view of how things *ought* to be; on the other hand, if nature is indeed “incompatible,” that is, if the essence of morality lies simply in one’s sense of duty and not in actions—morality seems to lose its point, which is not just to have an “inner” sense of being a virtuous soul but to do well in the world. That is what this section is about.

In Kant’s second *Critique*, the division of “Nature and Freedom” turns out some odd divisions in moral philosophy—which are a cause of much debate among his followers. For example, “happiness” turns out on the “Nature” side of the dichotomy, and this leads to some famously awkward questions that plagued Kant himself until his death.

168. Kant, *FMM*, p. 394.

For example, does one have a *duty* to be happy?—or is happiness not a moral concern? (Kant in fact answers in the *Foundations* that one does have a duty to try to become happy, for the somewhat odd reason that, if one is not happy, one is less inclined to do one's duties toward others.) If happiness is the end of the good life (which Kant admits readily) then what is the relationship between duty—which is impersonal and universal—and happiness, which is strictly personal and individual? (602) Kant argues that moral worth is based on the sense of duty *alone*, without reference to personal happiness.¹⁶⁹ Hegel answers, "The moral consciousness cannot forgo happiness and leave this element out of its absolute purpose" (*Ibid.*).

Of course, Hegel is right. No matter what conception and emphasis on duty and good intentions might be necessary for an adequate moral theory, we surely look with suspicion—at least—upon a theory that does not place some conception of personal well-being and happiness at its very core. But if "happiness" as such is not within the realm of "Will" but part of "Nature," a "natural aim" rather than a duty, then once again it appears as if a single set of considerations—living the good (including morally good) life, splits into two, the pursuit of happiness on the one hand and moral obligations and duties on the other.¹⁷⁰ But this is not only schizoid, in Hegel's view; it also leads to a most unreasonable consequence, even in Kant's own view. It is simply a matter of fact that the wicked sometimes prosper and the good suffer. And this fact is anathema to our sense of morality and justice. Therefore, Kant says, moral goodness, though it must not be performed for the sake of happiness, ought nevertheless to be rewarded by happiness. This leads, however, to a paradox; how is it that one can do one's duty for duty's sake and at the same time have an eye to its rewards? Kant in fact never resolves this for himself (and was working on some new solutions to it when he died in 1804¹⁷¹). But this is a crucial consequence of the Kantian split between "Nature" (the world of our natural inclinations, our physical actions and our happiness) and "Freedom" (the world of our good intentions, our will, sense of duty and moral worth.)

It is this schizoid split in our sense of ourselves that had turned Hegel against Kant in 1798, when he studied Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* and attacked Kant's "formalism" in "The Spirit of Christianity

169. Kant, *FMM*, p. 397.

170. *Ibid.* p. 442. Cf. *Kant's Political Writings*, trans. H. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970): "The individual is not thereby expected to *renounce* his natural aim of attaining happiness when the question of duty arises; for like any finite rational being, he simply cannot do so" (64).

171. *Opus Posthumum*, Adickes, ed. (Berlin, 1929).

and Its Fate" in 1799. There, and in the "Natural Law" essay, Hegel objected to the "alienation" of our selves from our selves, our passions ("inclinations") from our reason, our sense of well-being from our sense of duty—and this, of course, is what leads to his all-important conception of *Sittlichkeit*, that set of fellow-feelings that are both inclinations (in the sense that we "naturally," i.e. spontaneously, want to pursue them) and social duties as well. But Kant has no such conception, and his notions of duty and inclination are hopelessly isolated in each individual. The notion of duty includes reference to other people as a matter of logical necessity, according to Kant; but it does not include any reference to social welfare—which he would consider a mere contingency, and so too the notion of sacrifice for the group, which Kant finds a perennial puzzle and considers "supererogatory" ("beyond the call of duty") just because his solipsistic notion of morality cannot find a place for it. The notion that doing one's duty is rewarded in at least one important sense by the sense of belonging in *Sittlichkeit* itself is a notion that Kant never takes sufficiently seriously.¹⁷²

Where this split between duty and happiness, "Freedom and Nature," becomes most critical, however, is in the seeming "incompatibility" of the virtuous life of duty and the actual rewards of happiness. The desired commensuration of virtue and happiness, or what Kant calls "the *Summum Bonum*," is not a matter of fact (Kant: "It must appear strange that philosophers of both ancient and modern times have been able to find happiness in very just proportion to virtue in this life" ¹⁷³). And so Kant makes it a "postulate of practical reason"—in other words, a principle that must be believed if one is to be rational. It is not *known* to be true (since nothing in the realm of practical reason is known, on Kant's view) and is to be believed as a necessary presupposition of morality, according to Kant. But here Hegel sees a flaw in Kant's thinking which, years before, he had examined in some detail in the "Spirit of Christianity" essay and in the "Natural Law" essay too. Hegel's objection is, first of all, that such an utterly critical aspect of our search for the good life should be part of knowledge, not only a "postulate" (602). This is why, in the *Phenomenology* and in his later lectures on the Philosophy of History, Hegel is so concerned that some sense of "reason" in the over-all picture of human affairs can actually be *demonstrated*—not for each and every individual, perhaps, but for humanity in general. But, on the other

172. "A good will is capable . . . of its own kind of contentment" (*FMM*, 396) and "reason should have a power of *infusing a feeling of pleasure* or satisfaction in the fulfillment of duty" (460).

173. *Ibid.*, p. 456.

hand, Hegel has a keen sense of tragedy regarding individuals caught between duties and happiness or conflicting duties (Antigone, notably) which Kant seems not to have. Kant's "postulates of practical reason" make such a sense unnecessary, for through *faith*, if not knowledge, he really believed that, in the end, virtue and goodness would be made commensurable.

The "Postulates of Practical Reason" at stake here are two, in essence—the belief in God as an all-powerful all-good Judge and the belief in the immortality of the human soul. (A third postulate—belief in human freedom of action—is also crucial to Kant, but Hegel is not objecting to that here.) Kant's argument follows quite readily from what we have already indicated; since a good person would not reasonably act for the sake of duty if he or she also believed that the effort was ultimately hopeless, it would seem to follow in some (non-deductive) sense that, *if* one were to act morally and reasonably, he or she would also have to believe in future rewards and punishments, not in this life, guaranteed by a Supreme Judge who knows all and is concerned with perfect justice. The problem Hegel sees here is the tentative nature of that "if"; if the justification for believing in the two postulates is their necessity as presuppositions for accepting the moral view of the world, and if the justification of our acceptance of that moral view depends upon our acceptance of the two postulates, we have just argued ourselves into a tight and not at all virtuous circle. We believe A and B because they are entailed by C but we believe in C because of A and B. This is the central argument of the second (critical) stage of the section "Moral Duplicity" (616–31).

The problem of the Summum Bonum, like the problem of understanding the role of action in morality (as opposed to pure "good will"), stems from Kant's drastic division of the faculties of the soul, and it is this sense of dividedness that motivates Hegel's efforts throughout his various discussions of Kant and, ultimately, throughout the *Phenomenology*. But the split between faculties is a problem in its own right, in addition to the paradoxical consequences it entails in the realm of action and our sense of ultimate reward. To so distinguish the rational faculties of "Will" and our sense of duty from our "inclinations"—our sensuous urges, our "natural" desires, our pursuit of happiness—is to present us with a tragically alienated picture of ourselves, in which our "real selves" are our morally self-conscious selves and, opposed to them, are our various desires, needs, and hopes (603). Here again is that fatal split of the "Unhappy Consciousness," divided against itself, like the wretched ascetic who views his own "animal functions" with unmitigated horror and revulsion. Kant, how-

ever, is neither an ascetic nor unhappy. What he gives us, Hegel says, is another "postulate," this time, the postulate of the harmony of inclinations and duty, first of all in isolated individuals who have what Kant calls "a holy will" and "the idea of moral perfection" (in which one only wants what one ought to do).¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, Kant expresses his confidence in moral progress which, strangely enough, was particularly bolstered by the French Revolution.¹⁷⁵ Here again, Hegel rejects the postulation of some far off reconciliation in favor of the demand that one *now* demonstrate the necessary harmony of consciousness, instead of beginning with the view that our natural inclinations are intrinsically "vice-breeding" and "monsters which reason has to fight" (603). The desire to free oneself from one's inclinations which Kant urged is viewed as utter self-destruction by Hegel, particularly since Kant himself insists that this harmony "is a perfection of which no rational being in the world of sense is *at any time* capable."¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, if one did succeed in the impossible—in making oneself holy and harmonious—the moral consciousness as such would disappear (603). This is why Fichte, for whom striving is everything, celebrates the *lack* of what Kant postulates, since it is internal opposition, indeed something of an internal war, that makes life worth living. Thus Hegel rightly points out that both Kant and Fichte have masked another paradox, in this case, the goal of a task fulfilled and the need to retain that task as a task (*ibid.*).¹⁷⁷ One cannot have *both* a desire *and* its fulfillment.¹⁷⁸

Hegel thus interprets Kant with three wishful "harmonies" which in fact are all appealed to "the dim remoteness of infinity" (603): (1) the necessary interrelation of the moral consciousness as will and the actual state of the world through action; (2) the reasonable expectation that living the (morally) good life will be rewarded proportion-

174. *Ibid.*, p. 408–09.

175. "The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen unfolding in our day may succeed or miscarry; it may be filled with misery and atrocities to the point that a sensible man, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost—this revolution, I say, nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race" (Kant, *On History*, trans. L.W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 144.

176. *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 126 (emphasis added). Cf. Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, again on "man's desire to be God," i.e. to be complete within oneself but still to have purposes, struggles, aspirations.

177. *FMM*, p. 422. Cf. "Virtue is the strength of man's maxims in fulfilling his duty. We can recognize strength of any kind only by the obstacles it can overcome" (*Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 54).

178. Cf. Plato, *Symposium*: "Socrates: Love can only want what it lacks."

ately; and (3) the psychological necessity of finding one's inclinations not always at war with one's sense of duty. It is in action and the first hoped-for harmony, however, that Hegel believes all three come together (just as in *Antigone* it is action that brings the conflict of laws into consciousness (604)). Laws and the Summum Bonum are universal, but actions are particular and geared to particular situations. Therefore, one needs to distinguish in the Kantian-Fichtean philosophy two different moral consciousnesses: one providing the concept of morality ("the categorical imperative" etc.) in general, the other geared to the particular circumstances (much as Aristotle distinguished between the "major premise" of a practical syllogism which consisted of a general law and a minor premise which consisted of a "perception" (605)).¹⁷⁹ The first moral consciousness provides laws of duty without reference to particular content; the second moral consciousness is geared to circumstances, including one's own desire for happiness. There are elements in Kant which suggest such a division, but the target of this discussion is clearly Fichte who argues the idea of an "absolute" moral consciousness acting *through* us, which makes our duties "sacred" (605).¹⁸⁰

A new dichotomy has appeared, between the everyday self of moral activities and the "sacred" law-giver within us (607). (This new split will be of particular importance in understanding the final vicissitudes of this chapter.) As individual moral agents, we are condemned as the "Unhappy Consciousness" was condemned to forever seeing ourselves as imperfect and inadequate moral agents, unworthy of happiness and hoping for it only as a matter of "Grace" (608). The dialectic then takes its by now wholly predictable twist—as this unhappy moral consciousness makes every effort to reconcile its projected moral ideals with its own less than ideal intentions and actions, not realizing that we ourselves are the true moral consciousness, not merely imperfect shadows of some more perfect but unrealizable self inside of us (609–15). We once again reject Kant's two-world view and Fichte's one-sided emphasis on the moral struggle, on the "opposition" between the way things are and the moral struggle, on the "opposition" between the way things are and the way they ought to be.¹⁸¹ It was the appeal to the moral consciousness through which Fichte thought that he would "systematize" Kant and break down his schizoid world-view; in fact, he only replaced one opposition with another,

179. Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book VI, esp. chs. 9–11.

180. Fichte, *Science of Ethics*, trans. A.E. Kröger, and *Vocation of Man* esp. pp. 148–49. Kant's employment of this formulation of duty is to be found especially in his *Religion* of 1793 and his posthumous writings.

181. *Differenz*-essay, p. 159, Cf., of course, the famous *apologem* for actuality that opens up the *Philosophy of Right*, "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."

no less damaging, no less "unhappy," and no less cynical; "There is no moral existence in reality" (613).

The sub-section "Moral Duplicity" is mainly concerned, as we have already indicated, with Kant's postulation of an ultimate harmony between virtue (doing one's duty) and happiness (as its reward). But this concern is subsumed under a generally more Fichtean discussion of a set of separations within the moral consciousness itself, in particular, the shift of the most important moral considerations to a transcendent moral consciousness within us (but not, as such, us), relegating personal actions to mere imperfect efforts toward the realization of this "other" moral consciousness. This is the "duplicity," as in other parts of the *Phenomenology*, of shifting the burden of responsibility from oneself to some projected "other" and, in this case, treating one's own particular actions as of no real importance (616–17).

It is here that Hegel advances his second, more logical objection against the Summum Bonum thesis, that, even without questioning "the assumption that there is an actual moral consciousness" one cannot defend the postulated "harmony of morality and Nature" [virtue and happiness] as necessary to moral consciousness (618). The mere postulation is not in fact enough to justify moral action, and we cannot both defend our postulation in terms of morality and morality in terms of our postulates (618–19). Furthermore, in our "duplicity" we tend to dismiss the importance of our own actions as insignificant in the over-all improvement of the world, even though action, for most of us, is always possible and the only locus of our own moral efforts and moral worth. (We saw a similar argument against Kant's "love" formulation in the chapter on "Reason as law-giver" (425).) This concern should be put in the perspective of Hegel's own times, and his keen awareness, under the shadow of Napoleon and monumental forces at work in Europe, that little can be expected of the individual, and he can expect little of himself (Preface, 72). But this does not in any way unburden us of responsibility for our own actions and, ironically, it is this Kantian-Fichtean conception of "the moral consciousness" that allows us to do so. The view of ourselves as absolutely moral, in other words, allows us to dismiss our particular personal performances as not of ultimate moral importance (619). Kant clumsily corrects this intolerable paradox with his "second formulation of the categorical imperative," that one should always act *as if* the maxim of action were to become, not just a universal law (of morality), but a universal law *of nature* (619).¹⁸²

It is only "the highest good" (the Summum Bonum) that really mat-

182. *FMM*, p. 421 (emphasis added).

ters, but this again carries with it the paradox that, if achieved, moral consciousness—that is, the struggle—would no longer exist. This, Hegel argues, is why the moral consciousness cannot be absolute, cannot be the ultimately harmonious consciousness which idealism requires; moral struggle is not itself the end, the meaning of life (as in Fichte) but at most an over-zealous description of one distorted aspect of the over-all domain of spiritual concerns (620–21). In its efforts to purify the moral will and eliminate contrary desires and impulses, morality renders itself irrelevant to everyday action and the actual content of our actions, again only “postulating” some ideal agreement between them. This renders morality ultimately vacuous, since if this harmony were ever realized, the result would be, again, the end of moral consciousness, the end of the Fichtean struggle (622). Hegel also rejects Kant’s (and Fichte’s) confidence in “moral progress,” insisting that morality cannot be so quantified (623). But the upshot of all of these arguments is that morality as conceived by Kant and Fichte is an ultimately hopeless effort, not the concrete and satisfying participation in *Sittlichkeit* that is Hegel’s own ideal. Morality is not an isolated individual effort in which we are torn apart by warring factions within ourselves, discouraged by the fact that our individual actions contribute little if anything to the actual improvement of the world, embittered by the fact that our good deeds are not in fact rewarded in some individual tangible way and that our happiness—if indeed we are so lucky—has little if anything to do with our moral consciousness (624). Thus it is, years later, that Kierkegaard will attribute a mode of despair to the “ethical” person of much the same variety that he attributed to Don Juan, once he realized that he would never be satisfied. The ethical person, ultimately, accomplishes nothing. For Kierkegaard, this realization would hopefully lead to a “leap of faith” to religion, in which this impotence would be rationalized. For Hegel too, the intrinsically frustrating ideals of Fichte’s “ethical idealism” and Kant’s moral postulations suggest such a “leap,” not yet to religion, but—as we have seen several times before in the *Phenomenology* when times got tough—a withdrawal from the world.

In this case, the withdrawal is from the moral world and the rejection of moral consciousness as such (much as we saw in “Virtue and the Way of the World” in chapter 5). There is a tendency to nihilism, a rejection of the notion of moral worth altogether (625) and a final projection of all moral worth to the “other” moral consciousness in whom, again, Hegel suggests the moral consciousness itself would vanish (626–28). The now familiar paradox has a Sartrian ring; to be moral, we would have to be perfect, in fact, *be God*; but as God, mo-

reality would lose its point, and so we reject God (629–30). In fact, we reject everything but our own “inner” moral sense, making once again that retreat from the world which has demeaned philosophy and religion since ancient Stoicism. But this time, the retreat is from a too perfect idea of a distinctively moral world, and (as in the “Virtue” section of chapter 5) the retreat is in fact a kind of re-entry, a renewed recognition of our own moral worth, without the unflattering baggage of Kant and Fichte’s too-transcendental interpretation of “the moral consciousness” (631).

The final set of turns, again familiar to us throughout the *Phenomenology*, (particularly the sequence from “Stoicism” through “Unhappy Consciousness”) consists of the various strategies of inward retreat, now in the guise of “conscience” and a peculiar character called “the beautiful soul.” In the preceding two sections, we have already seen how moral perfectionism leads (both in theory and in our own familiar practice) to a kind of moral paralysis—an inability to act and a sense of despair when we do. Out of this impasse, two courses of action (or inaction) present themselves immediately. The first “nihilist” course is to forget about morality and aim simply for happiness, one’s own and others’ (625). The other course, which Hegel traces here, is to imagine the moral absolute in one’s own individual self (632). Thus the moral self-consciousness which goes by the name of “conscience” (also taken from Fichte, *Science of Ethics*¹⁸³) is yet a further breach with *Sittlichkeit*, since it utterly rejects the authority of community laws and opinions. It is also a kind of compromise, of sorts, between the too abstract and formal universal laws of morality and the particular circumstances of action. (Thus Fichte calls it “the material condition for the morality of action,” p. 217.) In addition, of course, it is also—though unacknowledged—the voice of *Sittlichkeit*. Thus Freud quite reasonably attributes “conscience” to the “Super-ego” and the consciously forgotten instructions of one’s parents in childhood; and Heidegger more mysteriously describes “conscience” as nothing but a seemingly foreign voice which is in fact one’s own, “unplanned, unprepared, unwilled.”¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, conscience has the distinct advantage of not confusing morality with an abstract set of formal calculations (as in Kant) or with the whole of a religious (Christian) world-view without which morality would be impossible (634).

Conscience is another one of those “forms of consciousness” which can be characterized as “certainty,” like “Sense-Certainty,” “Self-

183. Esp. ch. 8, p. 150ff, p. 217 f.; also *Vocation of Man*, pp. 136, 154.

184. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 189.

Certainty," etc. (635–37). It simply "sees" what is right, through the morass of conflicting duties and claims of the Kantian moral consciousness.¹⁸⁵ It does not separate duty from nature and the concrete reality in which it acts, for it is always geared precisely to the particular situation.¹⁸⁶ It is also relativistic, however, and in this it not only breaks with communal *Sittlichkeit* but retreats from the moral sphere proper, for morality, as Kant rightly insists, cannot be *just* a matter of personal feelings but necessarily universal and applicable to everyone. But conscience is certain only of what *it* must do, and the man of conscience, though he feels bound to obey his own intuitions, need not demand that anyone else do so (637). And yet, Hegel says, conscience nevertheless confers universal validity on its actions, and must be recognized as such by others too (639–40). In other words, we respect someone who "obeys" the dictates of conscience, even if we ourselves do not agree with or find absurd its demands. But here we find another familiar dilemma (from the sequence on "Self-Actualization" in chapter 5): the personal dictates of conscience at the same time present themselves as universal laws, and supposedly objective moral considerations turn in fact on personal emotional and personality factors (643). Thus the dictates of conscience can just as easily be viewed as a species of "duplicity" in which "conscience," for example, might dictate a course of action that might better be described as "cowardice" (644). Since the criteria for conscience are strictly personal, virtually any course of action can become "a matter of conscience," and its content is arbitrary (645). Indeed, it has no content at all, since it can arbitrate any law as it will at the moment (646) and there is utterly no guarantee of consistency or agreement with others in the moral community (647–49).

As in "The Law of the Heart," the dictates of conscience are quite rightly suspected by others as mere expressions of self-interest under the guise of morals (649–50). Moral language at this point loses its intelligibility, for words like "ought," which necessarily refer to what moral philosophers call "universalizable" propositions, now come to refer only to the "perverse . . . assurance that consciousness is con-

185. Kant's problem with conflicts of duties is notorious (*FMM*, 421f.) and exercises Fichte as well (in his *Science of Ethics*). Kant attempts a series of complex distinctions between "perfect and imperfect duties" and "inner and outer" duties to provide criteria for decisions between them, but it is Fichte who attempts to resolve the issue in a single stroke with "conscience" as "the material condition for morality" (217ff.).

186. This same move has been manifest in recent years in a simple-minded moral theory entitled "situation ethics"; it too appeals to immediate "insight" and systematically ignores the social parameters and determinants of conscience. Nevertheless, the *problem* to which it addresses itself—our overly formalized notion of "morality"—is very real.

vinced of its duty" (653), regardless of the form or content of that duty. It is the conviction itself, in other words, that is "the essence of the matter" (*ibid.*). If a person says he or she is acting out of conscience, there is nothing more to say, no proof, no argument (654). In due course, Hegel warns us, the person of conscience comes to see him or herself as divine; every act is right, "for its action is its contemplation of its own divinity" (655). But like all forms of certainty so deprived of any determinate content, conscience soon comes to recognize itself—however unhappily—as utterly empty, mere self-righteousness without any actual concern for what is right. The person of conscience is ultimately a fraud.

Again, we reach one of those impasses with a number of possible retreats or leaps. The correct response, in Hegel's view, would be to recognize what conscience has ignored all along, that its "voice" is in fact the echo of its own moral community, the dictates of *Sittlichkeit* and in no way its own; these dictates are neither arbitrary nor empty. But so long as morality is caught in the bind of individuality, this answer is not available (except, in Kantian language, under the unacceptable rubric of "heteronomy," "external" considerations which *interfere* with the purity of moral autonomy).¹⁸⁷ Or, one could, again, retreat to amoral "eudaimonism," working for a more or less measurable happiness but giving up claims to "morality" as such; or, one could make a further retreat "within," giving up morality but giving up happiness too, like the ascetic soul of "Virtue and the Way of the World," and like the "Unhappy Consciousness" once again (658). This is "the beautiful soul," the "pure consciousness" which stands "above" the moral world, who will not commit itself, who abstains from all actions as "compromising," and prides itself on "impotence";

It vanishes like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air. (658)

There is considerable debate concerning the actual references in this curious section. Hegel no doubt has in mind the self-styled "beautiful souls" of the local "romantik" circle—Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), the Schlegel brothers and dozens of lesser lights. And indeed, retreat into the pretensions of "divine" self-appreciation without regard to the state of the world was not an uncommon or a wholly unreasonable reaction to the state of Europe and Germany in particular in the first years of the new century. But I find this somewhat trivial interpretation of this crucial turn of Hegel's dialectic im-

187. *FMM*, 443–44. The notion of "Individuality" here is not in keeping with the structure of Hegel's chapters, but the problem is that various modes of individualistic thinking weave in and out of chapters 5 and 6 (as well as 4), interspersed with sections on alienated *Sittlichkeit*. It is not always possible to clearly distinguish them.

plausible, although, to be sure, the Romantics did play a part in his thinking and are most certainly alluded to here. But the “beautiful soul” section is the last section of “Spirit,” the immediate predecessor of the high-placed chapter on “Religion”, and it seems to me to be overly provincial to view Hegel’s concern at this critical juncture to be some of his obnoxious colleagues in Jena. The “beautiful soul” is indeed a key image of Romanticism, but it is not the Romantics themselves. Allusions aside, the moral content of the sub-section, on “evil and forgiveness,” suggests a far more significant interpretation of “the beautiful soul.”

I suggest that the beautiful soul in fact is Jesus, as a historical, moral example, not yet the Christ of Christianity but the spokesman for a moral move that Hegel had discussed explicitly, under the same name, in his early essay “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate.”¹⁸⁸ I will treat this aspect of the sub-section, accordingly, in our next chapter, on Hegel’s philosophy of religion. Jesus said that we should put ourselves “above” evil and *forgive* those who trespass against us, and He justified these attitudes by appeal to the loving concern of God His Father. That is not so much an ethical theory as a matter of theology.

As an ethical position, however, we can understand Jesus’ position as follows; given the already completed breach in *Sittlichkeit* and consequent retreat to the individual soul as moral agent, given the inapplicability of abstract and formal Kantian principles and the ultimate emptiness of the voice of individual conscience, the honest self-consciousness must accept the painful consequence that all moral declarations are hypocritical and self-serving (660–62). In fact, even to attack conscientiousness in others is a sign of a similar self-righteousness, and so too, attacking any moral position inevitably presupposes some other moral stance which is no more justifiable, just as self-serving and just as hypocritical (663). The “beautiful soul” therefore abstains from moral judgment altogether, and it does not act (664). But this in turn exemplifies a new kind of hypocrisy, since refusing to act against evil is in fact to condone it; in other words, no action can be as significant as action. (“If you’re not part of the solution, then you’re part of the problem.”) The “beautiful soul” sees through the pretensions of morality and the selfish motives within. When it judges others, however, it also deserves to be judged in turn. So it learns—through the genius of Christianity—not to judge at all. (“Judge not, that ye not be judged.”) Indeed, it is by confessing its

188. *Early Theo. Mss.*, pp. 234–37.

own total inadequacy that the "beautiful soul" finally evades all judgment, possibly through the salvation of Christianity, or possibly by the ironic turn that, in avoiding judgment, the "beautiful soul" emerges the moral superior, the victor in a moral contest which is no longer being played in the field of action, but simply in the realm of personal self-righteousness.¹⁸⁹ Hegel seems to believe the latter (666–68) but he proceeds to discuss the first, for the "beautiful soul" finally emerges as the reconciliation that is absolute Spirit (670) and enters into existence not just as the historical person of Jesus but as God himself (671).¹⁹⁰

Before we make the turn to Hegel's philosophy of religion, however, we ought to remind ourselves by way of a summary the simple moral of the preceding long and complex tale, from the refutation of hedonism to the rejection of "the beautiful soul." Hegel's point has been the inadequacy of individual ethics and the primary sense of ourselves as part of an ethical *community*. The various twists and turns of the argument, no matter how curiously organized, all lead us to this same conclusion. Our practical efforts in life, no matter how disastrously thwarted by a society that is no longer (if it ever was) a harmonious *Sittlichkeit*, all lead us to the same conclusion too—that the meaning of life is to be found in our sense of belonging, in friendship, love, patriotism and, ultimately, in *humanism*. But with our eye to the next chapter, we should also distinguish two humanisms—in line with Hegel's own objections to the Enlightenment: there is the negative, defensive, typically utilitarian notion of humanism, which rejects all suggestions of religiosity and, for that matter, all forms of individual self-sacrifice and dedication to a larger whole—whether God or the State; and then there is the more spiritual, more exhilarating humanism which is all-embracing, a sense of the human world itself as the ultimate object of worship and respect. It is the latter sense of humanism, not the former, which we now see emerging from those forms of consciousness traditionally at war with humanism. In religion, as Hegel sees it, humanism is not to be submerged under the shadow of an external divinity; to the contrary, the human world is itself that divinity. That is to say, "the Absolute."

189. The best example of this particular dialectic I know is Albert Camus's charmingly resentful "juge-penitent" Clamence in *La Chute* (*The Fall*). He confesses his "sins" to others in such a way, as to render himself beyond any possible criticism, and in doing so sets himself up as the moral superior to anyone who would listen to him—or who would not (trans. J. O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1957).

190. I owe a special debt of gratitude in this last section to John Leamons, who wrote his seminar paper on Hegel on this topic, May 1980 and helped me with my research.

Chapter Ten

The Secret of Hegel (Kierkegaard's Complaint): Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

No human being can ever have been in such distress as Christianity of late . . . The entire Christian terminology has been appropriated by speculative thought to its own purposes . . . The concepts have been emasculated and the words have been made to mean anything and everything. —Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

*The Secret of Hegel.*¹ With that provocative title, James Stirling launched his extravagant pioneering study of Hegel in English (1865). It has since been commented, wryly and often, that it has been a secret well-kept. But Stirling claimed to have divined the secret, and most British commentators² claim to have learned it with him: *Hegel is a Christian*, “the greatest abstract thinker of Christianity”³ and the aim of his difficult works is to “restore our faith, Faith in God, faith in Christianity as the revealed religion.”⁴ The “secret” is that “the universe is but a materialization, externalization, of the thoughts of God.”⁵ So would McTaggart argue at the turn of the century,⁶ and only a few years ago J.N. Findlay held that

[Hegel's] whole system may in fact be regarded as an attempt to see

1. J.H. Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel*, 2 vols. (London, 1865).

2. But not only British commentators: cf. Emile Brehier, in his *Histoire de la philosophie*; “What is religion for Hegel? It is essentially Christianity with its dogmas of the incarnate Word and the remission of sins” (vol. 4, p. 167). See also, Pannenberg in *Hegel Studien* (1970) and of course, B. Croce, *Cio che vive e cio che e morto della filosofia di Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1927).

3. Stirling, vol. 1, p. 78.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 85.

6. J.M.E.M. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1901).

the Christian mysteries in everything whatever, every natural process, every form of human activity, and every logical transition.⁷

For the reader who has troubled to read through Hegel's two-volume *Science of Logic*, or worse, through Stirling's two-volume *Secret*, this conclusion must be a bitter disappointment. On the contrary, Hegel's Christian apologetics would appear to be one of the best known "facts" about him, well-known even to those who would not think of reading him. Hegel took great pains, at the cost of great obscurity, to remind us of his ultimately religious intentions. The beginning of the *Logic*, for example, makes this difficult work all the more so with its abstruse suggestion that the truth of logic is nothing other than God. ("God and God only is the truth."⁸) Similarly, the *Phenomenology* (and the later *Encyclopaedia*) is peppered with references to Divinity in the most unlikely places. The sections on "Religion" appear to have been gratuitously and inappropriately but prestigiously placed at the penultimate stage of the dialectic (somewhat like Napoleon's mother in the chronicles of the coronation). Hegel insisted that he was a good Lutheran until his death, and in his lectures, he apparently defended the traditional doctrines of the Christian faith. One might say that Christianity is as much of a secret in Hegel as class conflict is in Marx.

But is Hegel "the greatest abstract thinker of Christianity"? There is good reason to think otherwise. Let us first consider an unsolved puzzle; in the years 1793–99, Hegel wrote but did not publish his early manuscripts on Christianity. Some are virulently anti-Christian, with Nietzschean contempt for the church and its priests, for Christian doctrines and authority. He even criticizes and parodies Christ himself. These essays have been argued to be of great importance for understanding the "mature" Hegel (e.g. by Dilthey (1905),⁹ Kaufmann (1954)¹⁰). Yet it is generally agreed that Hegel underwent an abrupt shift in his attitude toward Christianity about 1800. Even Kaufmann, who has been most responsible for familiarizing English readers with these essays and their import for Hegel's later work, refers to them as "Hegel's anti-theological phase."¹¹ But why this abrupt

7. J.N. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 130.

8. *Logic*, sect. 1, p. 3.

9. W. Dilthey, "Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften" (Berlin 1905), edited by Nohl (Tübingen, 1907), trans. T.M. Knox, as *Early Theological Manuscripts* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948) (*Early Theo. Mss.*).

10. W. Kaufmann, in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1959), ch. 8.

11. "Where he had previously condemned Christianity for its irrationality, Hegel later celebrated Christian dogmas as ultimate philosophical truths in religious form. Instead of achieving a crowning synthesis, he unwittingly illustrated his own dialectic by overreacting against the views of his youth and by going to the opposite extreme" (p. 161).

shift? What explains the radical difference between the young and the "mature" Hegel? ("Maturity" signifying, as usual, the more conservative position.) The answer I should like to pose to this puzzle (and several others) is unusual, for I believe that Hegel really did have a secret, and that it has been well-kept, at least by most orthodox Hegelians, including Sterling, McTaggart, and Findlay. The secret, abruptly stated, is that Hegel was essentially an atheist. His "Christianity" is nothing but nominal, an elaborate subterfuge to protect his professional ambitions in the most religiously conservative country in Northern Europe. Hegel had seen Spinoza's *Ethics* condemned in Germany. He had seen Kant, whom he considered to be unquestioningly orthodox, censured and censored by the narrow-minded regime of Frederick Wilhelm II. He had seen Fichte dismissed from the University at Jena for views that were (incorrectly) construed as atheistic. Is it only coincidence that the year of Hegel's "great conversion," 1800, is also the beginning of his professional philosophical career, and that the writing of the *Phenomenology* (1806) is simultaneously the time of his first professorship? Hegel may have been a champion of the Truth, but he knew how to look out for himself. He may have stuck to the letter of Christianity, but in "spirit" he was anything but a Christian. He was not the great abstract thinker of Christianity but rather the precursor of atheistic humanism in German philosophy. While holding a series of lucrative and powerful professorships under state auspices and with church approval, Hegel formulated the very doctrines which would soon undermine the Christian world-view, preparing the way for Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. But the "secret" was a prudential necessity for Hegel, much as we might think of Plato burying his Pythagorean formulae in anagrams to escape the fate of his illustrious teacher, or of Descartes, struggling in double-meanings to pass church censorship with his *Meditations*.

The poet Heinrich Heine, once a student of Hegel, confessed,

I was young and proud, and it pleased my vanity when I learned from Hegel that it was not the dear God who lived in heaven that was God, as my grandmother supposed, but I myself here on earth.¹²

Heine, a Jew and already an outcast, felt little of the usual timidity in calling a spade a spade. There is no God, only man. But to defend that conclusion in a respectable way, Hegel used religion and religious vocabulary as his instruments, as if the last logical consequence to be drawn from Christian doctrine is humanism, and the final meaning to be given to theological terminology is a meaning which refers strictly

12. Quoted in Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 366.

and exclusively to man's conception of himself. In other words, to solve our puzzle, there is *no* change in Hegel's attitude to Christianity, only in his sense of prudence and his ability to use what he rejects as the tool for its own rejection. What he hated in the early manuscripts, he still despises in the *Phenomenology* and his late lectures on Religion. What was false is still false, and what was repulsive to him was still repulsive. There is no turn from the "young" Hegel to the "mature" Hegel, except in style. Hegel may have despised Christianity, but he recognized its social power. Heine tells us of an incident:

One beautiful starry-skied evening, we two stood next to each other at a window, and I, a young man of about twenty-two who had just eaten well and had good coffee, enthused about the stars and called them the abode of the blessed. But the master grumbled to himself: "the stars, hum! hum! the stars are only a gleaming leprosy in the sky." For God's sake, I shouted, then there is no happy locality up there to reward virtue after death? But he, staring at me with his pale eyes, said cuttingly: "So you want to get a tip for having nursed your sick mother and for not having poisoned your dear brother?"—Saying that, he looked around anxiously, but he immediately seemed reassured when he saw that it was only Heinrich Beer, who had approached him to invite him to play whist.¹³

The idea that Hegel was a humanistic atheist was briefly defended after Hegel's death by the "left" Hegelians (e.g. Bauer and Marx), who saw him as a subtle subverter of Christian faith, against the "right" Hegelians, who took Hegel at his word as a Lutheran and as a defender of the faith. But this essentially religious dispute between the "left" and the "right" had political overtones, and soon the antagonism moved from the theological to the political arena, where it remains today. The atheistic Hegelians, including the young Marx, were far more concerned with changing the world than haggling with academic theologians. Accordingly, they left Hegel's religious position to the "right," who retained domination within the small circle of scholars who cared one way or another, at least until recently.¹⁴ Using Hegel's own public declarations, his explicit celebration of "revealed religion," and his consistently religious vocabulary, any theologian with a first degree in pedantry can prove that Hegel was a Christian. What is more difficult, however, is to understand just how limited the "religious dimension" of Hegel's thought really is, how nominal and how

13. Heine, *ibid.*, p. 367.

14. See for example, the variety of essays in D. Christensen, ed., *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970). The atheistic interpretation is scarcely mentioned, much less defended there. The Hegelian "left" has had its modern promoters, however, principally in Kojève's lectures (*An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*) and in *Dieu est mort: Etude sur Hegel*.

ironic.¹⁵ By the nature of the case, our thesis can have no public declarations to rely upon, and must argue against the explicitly religious doctrines and unquestionably exalted position of "religion" in Hegel's dialectic on the basis of conjecture and indirect evidence. But there are many clues, not the least of which are to be found in Hegel's curious statement of those doctrines and his structuring of those positions.

It is Hegel, before Nietzsche, who tells us (through the "unhappy consciousness") that "*God Himself Is Dead*" (785). It is a phrase that far better summarizes Hegel's philosophy of religion than all the abstruse speculation about "the externalization of thought" and the divinity of Spirit. In his early published essay ("Faith and Knowledge") Hegel invokes the image of "the Good Friday of speculation," which replaces the naïveté of Christianity with "the cheerful freedom of Godlessness."¹⁶ And readers of the *Phenomenology* have long been puzzled by its closing imagery, "The Calvary of absolute Spirit (808)."¹⁷ What is Calvary other than the death of God? But where the New Testament Calvary murders a man, returning Him to God, Hegel's Calvary murders God and returns him to man (763,779,781,785). A bizarre image, if the *Phenomenology* were in fact a religious treatise, but a fitting image for an elaborate and elusive defense of humanism. With a touch of perversity, Hegel uses the language and imagery of Christianity to establish the blasphemous position for which Spinoza was condemned and Fichte fired. It was as if a perverse Menshevik had published John Locke's second *Treatise* using Marxist terminology and the pen name of Karl Marx, then laughed as pedantic Bolsheviks attempted to integrate its doctrines with their own. If there is comedy to Hegel's work, as Jacob Læwenberg¹⁸ has so long argued, then surely it is here. Hegel's secret has been well kept. Only a few suspected, particularly an eccentric in Copenhagen who discovered the secret early on, but found the joke not at all amusing.

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

Hegel's interest—and his writings—in the philosophy of religion span his entire career. He studied theology in Tübingen, and his first known

15. E. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Philosophy* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967).

16. "Faith and Knowledge" (*Glauben und Wissen*). See Ch. 3.

17. Hegel: "*die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes*." Baillie trans.: "Golgotha."

18. For example, in his much-read introduction to the Scribner *Hegel: Selections* and in his own dialogal book, *Hegel's Phenomenology*.

writings are the early “theological” (or “anti-theological”) manuscripts of the years 1793–99, the years of his fascination with Kant’s *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793). In 1802, he published “Faith and Knowledge” in the second volume of the journal he edited with Schelling. In 1807, *Phenomenology* appears with “revealed religion” (“*Offenbare Religion*”) standing conspicuously at the end of a long historical “dialectic” of religious forms. In his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel omits the historical dialectic, mentioning only “revealed religion” (“*Die geoffenbarte Religion*”), again at the end of the dialectic but adding a polemical attack on alternative contemporary religious conceptions.¹⁹ Finally, there are Hegel’s Lectures on *Philosophie der Religion*, delivered and reworded in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831 (the year of his death), collected together by his students.²⁰ From the *Phenomenology*, in fact from “Faith and Knowledge,” until the *Philosophy of Religion*, the content, structure, and strategy of Hegel’s arguments change remarkably little. And though the structure and strategy of argument are surely different in the early manuscripts and the published work, it can be argued that the content remains the same. Underlying the polemical “anti-theology” of the manuscripts of the 1790s and the alleged rationalization of Christianity that are to be found in the *Phenomenology*, the *Encyclopaedia*, and the *Philosophy of Religion* is a continuity which must not be overlooked.

We have already seen how the early manuscripts are decidedly anti-Christian, sometimes viciously so, e.g. “the system of the church can be nothing but a system of contempt for human beings,” which provides “debasement monuments of human degradation.”²¹ This opinion of the church never varies, but the strategy changes. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel argues that, in the Middle Ages

thought begins within Christianity, accepting it as absolute presupposition. Later, when the wings of thought have grown strong, philosophy rises to the sun like a young eagle, a bird of prey which strikes down religion. But it is the last development of speculative thought to do justice to faith and make peace with religion.²²

Hegel does make peace, but only that peace which emerges after a decisive battle and a devastating victory. Enemies alive are objects of scorn, but enemies defeated are not only accepted but may be safely

19. *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 564–71.

20. Translated and edited by E.B. Spiers and J. Burdon Sanderson (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 3 vols. (From Schulze, *Sämtliche Werke*, vols. 11 and 12.) Abbreviated hereafter: “*Philosophy of Religion*.”

21. These comments are from the Positivity-essay and the Tübingen essay, respectively.

22. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction, published separately as *Reason in History*, trans. R.S. Hartmann. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), p. 21.

celebrated in praise. The *Phenomenology* constitutes such a thorough victory over the forces of Christian theology that Hegel can easily afford to allow its emaciated veterans to sit at the foot of absolute Truth, honoring them only so that he may be seen as merciful as well as victorious.

In the early manuscripts, Hegel had attacked Christianity "from the outside," from the side of the Enlightenment (even though Kant, with those same Enlightenment instruments of intellectual warfare, had served the church without serious complaint). But the church had long weathered such attacks, and the priests were well-fortified against them. In the *Phenomenology*, however, Hegel no longer challenges the stony walls of theology, but rather enters these walls as a gift, offering his philosophy to the battle-weary theologians. Forty years later we will hear the cry of Kierkegaard's *Laokoon*:

If this effort were to succeed, then would it have the ironical fate that precisely on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity.²³

In the *Phenomenology* (and also in the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Lectures*), Hegel argues that the short step from "revealed religion" to absolute truth consists in the simple alteration of form, the content remaining the same;

The Spirit of the revealed religion has not as yet surmounted its consciousness as such. . . . Spirit itself as a whole, and the self-differentiated moments within it, fall within the sphere of picture-thinking, and in the form of objectivity. The *content* of this figurative thought is absolute Spirit; and all that remains to be done is to supersede [*aufheben*] this mere form, . . . (788)

Faith has true content; still lacking in it is the form of thought.²⁴

And in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel tells us that "Religion and Philosophy have a common object, God in and for Himself," but that these have different "modes of appropriation." What are these different modes? Religion occupies itself with images and "picture-thinking" (*Vorstellungen*)—unsystematized, quasi-empirical spatio-temporal imagery. Philosophy abandons such mythology and restricts itself to what is essential to thought, that is, the Concept (*Begriff*). Thus the step from "revealed religion" in *Phenomenology* (chapter 7) to "Absolute Knowing" of chapter 8 is accomplished by "simply" replacing *Vorstellungen* by *Begriffe*.

Throughout his works, Hegel warns us of the dangers of such glib

23. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941) (CUP), p. 326.

24. *Philosophy of Religion* vol. III, 148.

distinctions as "form" versus "content." Let us be suspicious, therefore, of the glib suggestion that the difference between religion and philosophy is one simply of form, while their contents are identical. What is the "content" that remains the same?—*Absolute Spirit* or *God in and for Himself*. But Hegel has told us throughout the *Phenomenology* that Spirit is actual or "in and for itself" only when it has *comprehended* itself as a Spirit, and that the object or content of consciousness *changes* with its different forms (or "modes of appropriation"). The difference between Spirit as a represented *object* of awareness and spirit aware of itself is not merely a difference of form; it is the most essential difference of the *Phenomenology*, the difference between otherness, alienation, negativity and inadequacy, on the one hand, and absolute harmony and total comprehension on the other. God as object is the fateful disharmony of the early essays; God as subject is a conception which is out of reach of orthodox Christianity. So it is clear that this "mere" alteration in *form* must be far more than a simple "mere." The replacement of religious *Vorstellungen* with philosophical *Begriffe*, even while retaining *something*, is in fact the rejection of everything significant to Christianity.

What is Christianity, "revealed religion," divested of its "picture-thought" (787)? It is a faith without icons, images, stories and myths, without miracles, without a resurrection, without a nativity, without Chartres and Fra Angelico, without wine and wafers, without Heaven and Hell, without God as judge and without Judgment. With philosophical conceptualization, the Trinity is reduced to Kant's categories of Universality (God the Father), Particularity (Christ the Son), and Individuality (The Holy Spirit).²⁵ The incarnation no longer refers to Christ alone, but only to the philosophical thesis that there is no God other than humanity. Spirit, that is, humanity made absolute, is God. This is in fact *all* that is left of religion, the conception of humanity as God, which is to say that there is nothing other than humanity.

One may have all sorts of ideas about the Kingdom of God; but it is always a realm of Spirit to be realized and brought about in man.²⁶

God and incarnation become nothing more than the human community, Original Sin becomes human moral responsibility²⁷ and immortality, Heaven and Hell, are reduced to nothing more than the survival of the human Spirit in others after our individual deaths, a sense in which any animal is immortal insofar as it is survived by its

25. See, e.g., *Encyclopaedia* 567–71.

26. *Lectures in the Philosophy of History*, "Reason in History," p. 20.

27. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 45–48.

species.²⁸ What is left after the philosophical conceptualization of religion? To the orthodox Christian, *nothing* is left, save some terminology which has been emptied of its traditional significance. From Hegel's gutted Christianity to Heine and Nietzsche's aesthetic atheism is a very short distance indeed. Even McTaggart, who takes such considerable pains to save Hegel's Christianity for Christendom, is forced to concede,

Hegel supports Christianity against all attacks but his own, and thus reveals himself as its most deadly antagonist.²⁹

And Findlay, who elsewhere remarks that Hegel's exegeses "catch the very spirit and savour of the New Testament," finds it necessary to say that Hegel

has defined religion . . . in a manner to suit himself, his main motive being to secure for the difficult theses of his philosophy the approval normally accompanying the words "religion" and "religious". . . . Hegel, it may be claimed, is simply "cashing in" on this widespread approval, and securing its advantages for his own system.³⁰

There is a vital difference, of course, between mere atheism and irreligion, and it is to Hegel's credit that he constructs a humanist position transcending both. Similarly, there is a difference between not being a Christian and not being religious in some broader sense. It must not be thought that Hegel was not religious because he was not a Christian. In fact, his atheism was bolstered by his religiosity, the same religiosity that sustained him through the cynicism of his theological studies at the *Stift*, the same striving for *übermensch* status that characterized Goethe's Faust and Nietzsche's Zarathustra. They too might be called "religious" thinkers, but surely there was little that was Christian about them. For Hegel too, "religion" is an appeal to what is "above," but not what is better *than* humanity, rather what is potentially best *in* humanity: he tells us throughout his writing that "every person brings into the world not only the right to a mere animal existence but also the right to develop capacities, to become a human being." It is a position that might have come directly out of Goethe or Schiller. (Compare Schiller's remark: "Every individual human being carries within himself, as his potential and his destiny, the pure ideal image of man.") By "religion" Hegel means a striving for the infinite, not the "bad infinite" of endless Faustian dissatisfaction but the "genuine infinite" of total comprehension and participation

28. *Logic*, II, 24.

29. McTaggart, *Studies*, p. 251.

30. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 131.

in the world. Thus Hegel's concept of religion fits squarely into the French Enlightenment of Voltaire and Rousseau as well as into the German *Aufklärung* of Lessing, Herder, and Kant. Religion is mankind's impulse to a better life. It is not the lust for "otherworldly" after-life of the Christian Heaven but the "this worldly" aspirations of great artists, philosophers, statesmen, and truly religious people. Anticipating Nietzsche, Hegel tells us that religion is a "reconciling Yea" to the world, not an escape from it.

Our evidence for this thesis can be summarized by five more-or-less distinct considerations, although a thorough defense would have to examine, in detail and as a whole, the entirety of the Hegelian corpus. There are: (1) the now well-known anti-Christian diatribes of the early unpublished manuscripts; (2) the discussions of "Religion in General" in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Religion*; (3) the bewildering configuration of religious *Vorstellungen* of the *Phenomenology* and the more carefully developed dialectic of religions of Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*; (4) the appearance and *aufhebung* of Christianity at least twice in the early chapters of the *Phenomenology*; and (5) the demonstrably irreligious interpretation he gives to what he calls "revealed religion" (both in the *Phenomenology* and in the later lectures).

THE NATURE OF RELIGION: THE EARLY MANUSCRIPTS

The aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is morality. —Hegel, "The Positivity of Christianity"

We have already discussed Hegel's early "anti-theological" manuscripts in chapter 3. In his first essay of 1793 ("Folk Religion and Christianity"), Christian gloom and dogma are contrasted with the communal harmony of the Greeks. The "excesses of the bacchanals" are played against Northern "disharmony" and Christian melancholy, and Socrates is juxtaposed favorably against Jesus. The criterion is distinctively Enlightenment—the betterment of humanity—but the sense is Romantic, that familiar sense of unity and communal belonging. Indeed, Hegel attacks the Enlightenment even as he uses it, for it too (as we have seen in chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*) is "alienating." Hegel attacks knowledge and doctrines in favor of communal rituals and practices, and what emerges is a celebration of a religion which is in every aspect diametrically opposed to Christianity. He praises

religion, but not the “true” religion—“subjective religion is pretty much the same in all human beings.”³¹

In 1795 the “Life of Jesus” essay was Hegel’s clumsy attempt to integrate Jesus and the Enlightenment, interpreting the Sermon on the Mount as Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, more or less. But Jesus here is not anyone more than an ordinary mortal; the theology of Christianity is thoroughly jettisoned, and the mysteries and miracles of that religion are thoroughly discredited (as they had been by Kant too) as anti-thetical to reason and morality. The Positivity-essay of the same year pursued this theme more systematically and with more of a sense of historical fidelity; but the criterion is the same—that religion serve morality and practical reason—and the conclusion is the same too—that Christianity fails to do so. It is “positive” (authoritarian) and antithetical to rational autonomy; it is degrading and alienating, and therefore harmful to our sense of health and community.³²

In the “Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate,” in 1799, one discerns a change of temper, a new sense of conciliation. Hegel’s ambition was to found a new religion much more like Greek folk religion, which he shared in the middle of that decade with Hölderlin and Schelling, and which he had so awkwardly formulated in his “Life of Jesus” essay. In the “Spirit” essay, his efforts are aimed more at salvaging what is rational and acceptable in Christianity, its “Spirit” instead of its letter.³³ Whether what is left—which mainly revolves around the concept of “love”—is indeed Christianity is not a matter I want to argue here. But it is crucial to note how much is lost—virtually the whole of Christian theology, the church and even the new theological doctrines of Kantian practical reason—the doctrines Hegel and his friends had debated in the Tübingen *Stift*. What remains is a confidence in reason and the emphasis on unity, and, a few years later, in “Faith and Knowledge;” “Reason” is defined by Hegel as the search for unity.³⁴ But “unity”—not only between people but with nature, the law, the state, and ourselves—is not the exclusive province of Christianity. One might refer to this, as Hegel and his friends did, as “religion,” but religion is not just Christianity, and the search for unity could be as much the ideal of the pre-monotheistic philosophy of Aristotle or the atheistic thoughts of Heine, Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre

31. Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 131.

32. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 58.

33. *Ibid.* pp. 182–301.

34. “Faith and Knowledge.”

as it was a part of 19th-century Christian theology. With this in mind, we can finally turn to the discussion of religion in the *Phenomenology*.

THE NATURE OF RELIGION IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY* (AND LATER WORKS)

The self-knowing spirit is, in religion, immediately its own self-consciousness. (677)

What is immediately striking about Hegel's introduction to "Religion" in the *Phenomenology* (672–83) is that there is not a single mention of "God" or "Divinity" or even "Sacred" but only the familiar terms "Spirit," "Self-Consciousness," "Reason," and "absolute Being," terms which apply just as well to non-theistic religions and non-religious metaphysics. Hegel surprisingly informs us that we have been tracing the various forms of religious consciousness throughout the *Phenomenology*, in the chapter on "Understanding," in the "Unhappy Consciousness" of medieval Christianity, of course, in our investigation of "Reason" and throughout the chapter on "Spirit." "Religion," we now come to see, is nothing other than that search for all-comprehensive unity that has driven the *Phenomenology* from its Introduction onward, the motivating force behind almost all of the various forms of consciousness, whether they (or we) recognized this or not. Accordingly, Fackenheim tells us, "Religion may be one of the forms of spiritual life, but it is also the basis and the condition of the possibility of the system in its entirety."³⁵

What sense of "religion" would include not only Greek folk-religion (in *Antigone*, for instance) and "the Unhappy [Christian] Consciousness" but "Understanding" (673) and "Enlightenment" (675) as well? It is the recognition of a supersensible infinity, in some sense "beyond" the immediate finitude of everyday life.³⁶ Thus "Understanding" recognizes the "*supersensible* or the *inner side* of objective exist-

35. Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Philosophy*. It is Fackenheim, most recently, who might serve as our dialectical complement in this chapter (along with McTaggart, Sterling *et al.*). In his illuminating book, he stresses Hegel's religious affinities, while I want to de-emphasize them. He derides the "idolizers of the early writings," thus eliminating the first of our arguments, on the grounds that one should not trust unpublished manuscripts (p. 156). But if our suspicions are correct about Hegel's covert anti-theology, we should trust imprudent unpublished assertions at least as much as we trust his published works.

36. This question of man as capable of the infinite is one of the main themes Hegel borrowed directly from Schelling, whose religious sensibilities were never so much in question. This allows Hegel, however, to make impressive claims against Kant *et al.* and

tence" (673), but this is "devoid of self" and thus "a long way from being Spirit" (673). If we take Kant to exemplify this "form of consciousness," we can think of that "unknown x" or "noumenon" which lies behind (or "within") the objects of the understanding, the "thing-in-itself" which later appears, in Kant's theory of "Practical Reason" and religion, as the content of morality and religious faith.³⁷ "Unhappy Consciousness" is quite explicitly aware of a "beyond of self-consciousness" as well as its own "changeless essence," but it is pure "*pain of spirit*," which has not yet come to see its ordinary self-consciousness and this infinite "beyond" as a harmonious and happy unity (Ibid.). "Reason," however, "has no particular religion", because it is so caught up in "the immediate present", whether in the "observing reason" of scientific curiosity or the "rational self-realization" of the search for the good life in pleasure or virtue (Ibid.).

And yet, though "Reason" has no religious forms as such, "Spirit" does, even the godless Enlightenment, which, Hegel charges, recognizes the infinite (of "Understanding") but ignores it, remaining "satisfied in *this world*" (675). This is a curious charge, to be sure, but not entirely original. Hegel had used it before, in "Faith and Knowledge,"

seemingly for religion—for example, in the following sarcastic passage from "Faith and Knowledge"—

The fixed standpoint which the all-powerful culture of our time has established for philosophy is that of a Reason affected by sensibility. In this situation philosophy cannot aim at the cognition of God, but only at what is called the cognition of man. This so-called man and his humanity conceived as a rigidly, insuperably finite sort of Reason form philosophy's absolute standpoint. Man is not a glowing spark of eternal beauty, or a spiritual focus of the universe, but an absolute sensibility. He does, however, have the faculty of faith so that he can touch himself up here and there with a spot of alien supersensuousness. It is as if art, considered simply as portraiture, were to express its ideal aspect through the longing it depicts on an ordinary face and the melancholy smile of the mouth, while it was strictly forbidden to represent the gods in their exaltation above longing and sorrow, on the grounds that the presentation of eternal images would only be possible at the expense of humanity. Similarly philosophy is not supposed to present the Idea of man, but the abstract concept of an empirical mankind all tangled up in limitations, and to stay immovably impaled on the stake of the absolute antithesis; and when it gets clear about its restriction to the sensuous—either analyzing its own abstraction or entirely abandoning it in the fashion of the sentimental *bel esprit*—philosophy is supposed to prettify itself with the surface colour of the supersensuous by pointing, in faith, to something higher (p. 65).

But "the cognition of man" is ambiguous between men's knowledge and knowledge *about* man, and so too is the "something higher" ambiguous between something *more than* man and man himself (and his philosophy) as "higher." The language of "the gods," of course, is poetry and obfuscation, and the upshot of the passage—and the essay—is that knowledge itself is infinite and of the infinite. But nothing much follows about the divine stature of that infinity, unless "divine" means simply "holistic."

37. This was Hegel's charge against Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi in "Faith and Knowledge." He says, for example:

The idealism of which these philosophies are capable is an idealism of the finite; not in the sense that the finite is nothing in them, but in the sense that the finite is received into ideal form: they posit finite ideality, i.e., the pure concept, as infinity absolutely opposed to finitude, together with the finite that is real and they posit both equally absolutely. (In its subjective dimension, that is, in Jacobi's philosophy, this idealism can only have the form of scepticism, and not even of true scepticism, because Jacobi turns pure thinking into something merely subjective, whereas idealism consists in the assertion that pure thinking is objective thinking.) (p. 64).

and half of the undergraduates in philosophy have used it at one time or another. It is that perverse twist of argument that informs the atheist, much to his or her surprise, that atheism is itself a religious belief, since (in the paradoxical formulation of Tom Stoppard³⁸), there must be a God for one to refuse to believe in. In other words, it is enough to be religious, if not honestly and adequately so, simply by having a concept of the infinite beyond everyday experience. It may be "an *empty* beyond," but it is still a "beyond," and this is enough for religion in general.³⁹

Religion, in short, is nothing but the recognition of the infinite, and true religion, accordingly, is the recognition of this infinity *as oneself*. Thus Hegel accuses even "the religion of morality" (i.e. Kant's "Practical Reason" and Hegel's own early attempts to reduce religion to morality) of being "bound up with the negativity of the Enlightenment," that is, trying to deny the validity of the religious as such and reducing it instead to some function of the finite, for example, as "postulates of Practical Reason" in Kant (676). Indeed, the problem all along has been that same division of the finite (ordinary, everyday experience) and the infinite, which always escapes us. This was the problem Hegel announced in "Faith and Knowledge" and turned against Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte. And now, in the *Phenomenology*, it is about to be corrected. "Religion" proper is "Spirit knowing itself as Spirit" (677), and the wholesale rejection of this distinction between finite self and finite objects of knowledge and activity, on the one side, and infinite "beyond" on the other. But not even "religion" actually succeeds at this, Hegel tells us, for throughout its long history it has always tended to see itself in only *part* of our existence, in other words, in certain religious objects or persons (678). For Hegel, "religion" must encompass *everything* and here, again, we recognize that grand image of the universal "Spirit" that Hölderlin had formulated back in Tübingen. The religious is not a special realm of objects or concerns but the holistic consciousness of everything in life. Against Hölderlin's poetic image and the whole of Christianity, Hegel also insists that this holistic consciousness cannot be mere "picture-thinking" (*Vorstellungen*). It cannot remain an "image". It must be the "concept" (*Begriff*)

38. Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (New York: Grove Press, 1972).

39. Here, of course, we should remind ourselves again of Hegel's classic pre-Kantorian distinction between two senses of "infinite," the spurious infinite of "beyond" (that is, an endless sequence) and the "genuine infinite" of self-containment. Although the distinction is not made here in the *PG* it is clear that Hegel rejects virtually all religious thinking as the former, while preparing to defend his own conceptual formulation of the Absolute as the latter. Religion looks for infinity in "beyond"; Hegel finds it in self-enclosed Oneness (*Logic*, 94ff: on Spinoza and, p. 322n.).

of the whole, and this is what religion has never given us (*ibid.*). At most, religion has been a movement (in fact, the entire movement traced in the *Phenomenology*) toward this realization (679–80).⁴⁰

Goethe's Faust was warned against saying to the moment, "Stay, thou art so fair!" This was not because the Devil had any fear that Faust would be satisfied; he knew that striving is the very soul of human consciousness. It does not matter whether this "striving" takes on a secular or a particularly Christian content; the striving is essential to every form of consciousness, and this is what Hegel calls "religion" (680–81). It need not concern a sense of mystery or the frustration of never seeing or understanding the goal. It certainly need not be the striving toward some external salvation and judgment. It is rather, Hegel tells us, "the completion of the life of the Spirit," the recognition of its holistic unity. Religion is that sense of striving for unity which, in his early writings, Hegel had said was the very antithesis of Christianity. Indeed it is as if *every* form of consciousness is religious, and so what Hegel calls "revealed religion," terminology aside, resembles Aristotle's metaphysics far more than it does the theology of the Christian church.

The *Phenomenology* provides us with much too little by way of a general account of religion. Under pressure to complete the manuscript, Hegel evidently hurried on to the religious dialectic itself, embedding the general analysis of religion and the criteria according to which religions can be evaluated within this dialectic. The *Encyclopaedia* is also of little help. The brief section on "Absolute Spirit" includes no religious dialectic and simply repeats, in encapsulated form, the principles which were anticipated in the early manuscripts:

Religion . . . issuing from the subject and having its home in the subject, must no less be regarded as objectively issuing from the absolute Spirit which as Spirit is in its community.⁴¹

and, more succinctly, "God must be apprehended as Spirit in his community."⁴²

Fortunately, Hegel's lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion* contain a laudable account of his conception of religion in general, employing the same terminology and maintaining the same general theses as the *Phenomenology*.⁴³ We might also say that the lectures maintain the same

40. Thus even "Revealed Religion" is criticized (in considerable detail) for its "picture-thinking" and for its failure to recognize *itself*, rather than the object of its worship, as "absolute being-for-self" (787).

41. *Encyclopaedia*, 554.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, pp. 89–258; *PG*, 672–683.

general theses as the earliest manuscript on "Folk-Religion," except, of course, that Christianity is treated far more respectfully—or should we say, prudently. What is of first importance in religion is *feeling* (*Gefühl*), a feeling of awe, of worship, of respect for something greater than ourselves, a feeling of dependence and subordination. But this "something greater than ourselves" cannot be something wholly *other* than ourselves, except at cost of the alienation that Hegel rejected in the "Spirit of Christianity." We may quickly summarize Hegel's religious dialectic in a sentence: the closer a religion comes to recognizing the ultimate religious object as Spirit, the higher it is placed on Hegel's ladder. Christianity is salvaged by a sleight of hand, since Christianity approaches the conception of Spirit by maintaining that at least one historical human being is identical with God. That is one more than other religions (not counting the less celebrated because so much more transient roles played by the various Greek, Roman, and Norse gods and goddesses, who were fond of taking mortal shapes and intruding into the way of the world). Thus Hegel attempts to pull off the most tenuous, if not outrageous, transition in his philosophy.

Hegel's concept of "feeling," which he borrows from Kant's third *Critique*, is worth considering in some detail, not only for its importance in his philosophy of religion, but for its anticipation of certain contemporary issues as well. Hegel's "feeling" is emphatically not merely "subjective" but necessarily takes an object and an objective content. Hegel insists (with Kant) that this notion of feeling overcomes the distinction between "subjective" and "objective." Seventy years later, Franz Brentano (who disliked both Kant and Hegel) and then Husserl (who despised Hegel) would introduce a similar concept of "intentionality." But here in Hegel is the explicit rejection of his old, simple-minded distinction of the first manuscript, yet based on an appeal to its central tenet, the primacy of feeling over theology.⁴⁴ Religion begins with feeling, but feeling is not sufficient. Against the dominant Romantic theology of the time, Hegel insisted that feeling be bolstered by thought, and that the object of feeling could not remain an indeterminate something or other. "Religious feeling becomes yearning hypocrisy."⁴⁵ (Against Schleiermacher's insistence upon the sufficiency of feelings of dependency for religion, Hegel commented that "a dog would then make the best Christian.") The object of religious feeling must be *represented*, by an image, an icon, an idea. But the objects of religious worship are infinite, while images and

44. See ch. 3, "Freedom, Feeling and Folk-Religion." Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 481–507.

45. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 50.

icons are finite. (Ideas, that is, concepts, need not be finite, and so ultimately are the best vehicles of the Absolute.) But the tension between infinite object and finite representative symbol requires resolution. "Unhappy Consciousness," is precisely the attempt to resolve this tension in the realm of thought alone. But what is required (and here we return to the Greeks) is not thought but practice, not theology but ritual. Where the unhappy consciousness resigns itself to the impossibility of unity (Cf. Kierkegaard's "knight of resignation"), folk-religion resolves the tension through action. Thus Hegel introduces the third essential component of religion, "the *cult*"—the same folk-element that appeared in the first essay. This tripartite conception of religion as feeling, representation, and cult constitutes *faith* in general. Where Kant rationalizes faith as a postulate of practical reason, Hegel makes faith a matter of community spirit. Faith is a shared feeling for the symbolically represented infinite.

In transcending religion for philosophy, Hegel retains feeling and community, but gives up representation. This means giving up image and icon in favor of the idea, and so means giving up art in general as a vehicle of absolute Spirit.⁴⁶ Representation served as a vehicle for the religious only until philosophy found its strength. That is, until the mass of men were sufficiently intelligent to understand the bold humanism of Hegel's philosophy and reject the old mythology. But they are still not ready, Hegel finds (like Nietzsche's despairing madman of *The Gay Science*).⁴⁷ In the essay on "Positivity," Hegel repeatedly insists that Jesus' reliance on miracles and magic was justified by the conceptual opacity of his audience.⁴⁸ In the *Phenomenology* too, there are frequent musings to the effect that men in general are perhaps not yet ready for "science," and even in the *Philosophy of Religion*, there are repeated warnings that "Man in general cannot grasp the idea . . . He needs to *see* it." Thus religion is a primitive groping toward philosophy, a view of the Absolute through finite symbols. It is an *approach* to philosophy, but falls as short of its subject matter as the stories timid parents tell their inquisitive children. Religion earns its high place in Hegel's dialectic only because it encompasses all other forms of consciousness and is essentially community spirit and the collective effort to comprehend the whole. Religious feeling has been driving the dialectic from the first; religious representation, we now find, is nothing other than that variety of inferior attempts to grasp the Absolute which we have followed through the *Phenomenology*. Re-

46. Thus, Hegel parts company with Schelling and the Romantics once again. It is worth noting, however, that art plays virtually no role whatever in this all-encompassing panorama of human experience. For the reason, see "Spirit as Artist," in this chapter.

47. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1972).

48. *Early Theol. Mss.*, p. 78f.

ligion earns its high status, therefore, not on the basis of feeling or *Vorstellung*, but on the basis of *cult*.

In "Spirit," we have earned our sense of community, but our communities are still individual and separated nations and states, at odds with each other, sometimes at war with each other. Here is religion's ultimate contribution to human consciousness—religion teaches us universal Spirit, that is, the human community, unlimited by geographical boundaries or epochs of history. Here is the culmination of the movement from the clash of egos in the Master-Slave conflict to the harmonious community and nation-state of Spirit. But if anything, "the slaughter bench of history" has been caused by religious disputes. Thus Hegel's exaltation of religion is distinctly opposed to any particular religion, and it is as antithetical as possible toward those which would designate themselves "chosen people" or "the Way" or "the Righteous." The point of religion is precisely to teach us that there are no special privileges in Spirit, that humanity is One.

The Dialectic of Religions

The genesis of religion *in general* is contained in the movement of the universal moments. But since each of these attributes was exhibited, not merely as it determines itself in general, but as it is in and for itself, i.e. as it runs its course as a totality within itself, therefore, what has come to be is not merely the genesis of religion *in general*: those complete processes of the *individual* aspects at the same time contain the *specific forms* of religion itself. (*Phenomenology*, 680)

It is no surprise that the chapter of the *Phenomenology* on "Religion" is dialectical, that is, progressive or developmental in form. We should be surprised at the scope of this dialectic, however. It does not begin at the end of the preceding chapter and build upon it: rather, this progression immediately returns to the beginning of the *Phenomenology* and reconstrues the entirety of the book as a series of religious forms. Moreover, the particular entries in this progression ought to disturb us. Each of them is an ancient religion, sometimes grossly mischaracterized, and conveniently stuffed into a dialectical pigeon-hole. A moment's reflection, however, coupled with a reading of the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Religion* (esp. "The Relation of the Philosophy of Religion to Its Presuppositions and to the Principles of the Time"⁴⁹) shows that this is not merely a play-off of historical forms

49. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, pp. 6–48.

at all, but that each has a contemporary counterpart. Thus it is important to keep in mind the religious polemics in which Hegel was involved at the time: Enlightenment “deism,” Romanticism and intuitionism, the glorification of God as an Artist (Schelling, for example), scientific atheism (e.g. LaPlace’s rejection of God as “an unnecessary hypothesis”), the Kantian characterization of religion in terms of morality and practical reason. Moreover, the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* is essentially repeated in the *Philosophy of Religion*.

The religious dialectic of the *Phenomenology* appears in two different yet parallel forms. First, there is the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, viewed as a (non-temporal) progression of *religious* forms of consciousness. Hegel reviews these in “Religion” (677–82). Second, there is the actual dialectic of chapter 7, which may be cautiously mapped onto the later lectures that make up the *Philosophy of Religion*.

Hegel has already picked out for us the key “religious” forms of the *Phenomenology* so far—“Understanding,” “Unhappy Consciousness,” the whole of “Spirit” but especially Greek folk-religion and “the religion of morality,” which is readily identifiable as the theology of practical reason of Kant (and Fichte), which Hegel had learned at the *Stift*.⁵⁰ In the dialectic of religious forms that occupies the bulk of Chapter 7, however, Hegel does not limit himself to these but treats virtually every “form of consciousness” so far discussed as a possible religious form, albeit in “an arrangement that differs from the way they appeared in their own order” (681). This vast array of possible forms is basically reduced to a general triad, albeit not exactly “thesis-antithesis-synthesis”; there is, first of all, *immediate* or “natural” religion, which looks for its sacred forms in objects outside itself. Then there is religion “of the self,” or “the Religion of Art,” which “raises itself to the form of the self through the creative activity of consciousness whereby this beholds in its object its act or the self” (683). This is virtually always interpreted by commentators as Greek anthropomorphic religion, but it also contains no small amount of Schelling and Schiller. Finally, there is “the unity of both” as “Revealed Religion,” which is “the true *form*” (*Gestalt*, “shape”) of religion, which needs only to be made into philosophy. The three categories clearly fit the “Consciousness; Self-Consciousness; Reason” divisions of the *Phenomenology*, and they also fit exactly the divisions of the later *Philosophy of Religion*: “The Religion of Nature,” “The Spiritual Work of Art,” and “Revealed Religion.” But the dominant inspiration of this dialectic, however different its forms, is the *Bildungsreligion* of Gott-

50. See Harris, esp. pp. 57–153.

hold Lessing, for it was he who had argued that the various religions could be seen as a logical progression of realizations of the Absolute, in varying stages of inadequacy.⁵¹

The very idea of a dialectic of religions deserves some comment, and Hegel provides us with one in his introduction to "Natural Religion" (684). He says,

The series of different religions which will come into view, just as much sets forth again only the different forms of a *single* religion, and, moreover, of every single religion, and the ideas which seem to distinguish one actual religion from another occur in each one. At the same time, however, the difference must also be viewed as a difference of religion. (Ibid.)

The problem here is a paradox that virtually defined the Enlightenment concern with religion, though Hegel does not talk about it in chapter 6 (where it is the French Enlightenment that is mainly considered). The problem exercised Lessing especially, and it is this: if one insists that "there are no religions, but only religion," that all the particular religions—whatever the differences in their imagery and theology—are actually but different approaches to one and the same subject, "the sacred" or "the infinite" or "God," then one cannot believe that one's own religion is the "true" religion. On the other hand, if a believer does believe in the absolute truth of his own religion, then he cannot also accept the co-validity of other religions.⁵² That is, one needs to show that not only the content but the *forms* of these various religions can somehow be brought together. In a sense, this is what Hegel (following Lessing) is doing; but in another sense, he circumvents the problem by rejecting religion in favor of philosophy, which dispenses with religious forms altogether.

NATURAL RELIGION: THE RELIGION OF LIGHT

The first form of religion considered, *Das Lichtwesen*, "the pure, all-embracing and all-pervading *essential light* of sunrise, which preserves itself in its formless substantiality" (686), is explicitly paired with "Sense-Certainty." (Thus "Understanding" is not, as announced, the first form of religion to be considered.) The God of this form is "pure *being*," but also "the many-named One," "clothed with the manifold powers

51. On Lessing's *Education [Erziehung] of Mankind*, see Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 99, 157. Lessing's three stages were the Old Testament, the New Testament, and a new "enlightened" religion.

52. See Fackenheim for a good discussion of this; pp. 126, 162.

of existence and with the 'shapes' of reality as with an adornment that lacks a self . . ." (687). These "shapes" are "merely messengers, having no will of their own, messengers of its might, visions of its glory, voices in its praise" (687). "Its otherness," Hegel tells us, "is equally simple negative, *darkness*" (686).

What is this "religion of Light"? In the *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel identifies it historically with Zoroastrianism.⁵³ Yet it is also necessary to wonder whether or not it applies more importantly to Judaism, which Hegel does not discuss at all in the *Phenomenology*, but which receives extended attention in the later lectures.⁵⁴ And, more immediately, we should not prevent ourselves from noticing the essential similarity between this "sense-certainty" religion of light with its formless and indeterminate God and the claims of Jacobi and the intuitionists. In our discussion of "Sense-Certainty," we pointed out that this form of consciousness was not only to be construed as empiricist epistemology but as a form which included all forms of intuitionism, religious intuitionism as well. Thus it would not be far-fetched, and would certainly bring this religious dialectic back into the 19th century and avoid our "temporalizing" or "historicizing" it, if we were to take this *Lichtwesen* as an allegorical presentation of one mode of religious theory which Hegel was particularly anxious to refute at this time.

PLANT AND ANIMAL WORSHIP

The second form considered, not surprisingly, is explicitly linked to Perception (*Wahrnehmung*), with its religious forms rendered determinate through various creatures of the earth. Like its epistemological counterpart, this form of religion finds itself in an uncomfortable position of being unable to see its diverse forms as a unity. It is worth noting that this form, tailor-made for the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, does not appear in the *Philosophy of Religion*. It is also worth noting that the dialectic of the later lectures does not begin with the religion of light, which appears only in the *third* section of "The Religion of Nature." Preceding it are discussions of "immediate religions," cults of magic, and then Chinese and other religions which are "conscious of a Substantial Power, . . . and of the powerlessness of the immediate will."⁵⁵ Hegel explicitly designates Chinese religion as a form of

53. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 70–82, esp. 77f.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–219.

55. *Ibid.* vol. 1, p. 317.

“pantheism,” and here in the *Phenomenology* it is clear that “plant and animal” religion is a form of pantheism (the view that God is to be found in everything, or that every creature is sacred). In *The Philosophy of Religion* Hegel seems to ascribe pantheism to virtually all of Eastern religion (as much as he knew of it). Indian religion too is treated as “an abstract unity more nearly akin to Spirit”⁵⁶ and Buddhism is mentioned as “the concrete embodiment of this unity living in one individual.”⁵⁷ But in the *Phenomenology*, he refers to this “plant and animal” pantheism as “impotent” (694).

In the later lectures, when Hegel is no longer concerned with an exact mapping of religion onto the *Phenomenology*, the religion of light (which is there also referred to as the “religion of the Good,” bringing it closer to historical Zoroastrianism) is succeeded by “the Syrian religion of Pain” and religions of “Mystery.” The differences between the books make us wonder just how much the religions of the *Phenomenology* are forced into the shape of the preceding dialectic without regard for historical accuracy or their conceptual relationship to each other, free from extraneous “architectonic” considerations. If there is any section of the *Phenomenology* against which the charge of “arbitrariness” (or manipulativeness) may be levied, it is this section on religion.

THE TASKMASTER (“ARTIFICER”)

It is at this point that a religious form comparable to “Understanding” appears, and once again, we are tempted to accuse Hegel of squeezing in historical forms for the convenience of his chapter, rather than “letting the concepts develop themselves” as he insisted in the Preface. This new religion is entitled “the Taskmaster” (*die Werkmeister*) who enjoys producing “pyramids and obelisks” (692). Here is the beginning of art-religion, the expression of Spirit in material images. It is the difference between this attempted expression of the Absolute in images and the impossibility of such expression of the formless God of *das Lichtwesen* that adds to the possibility that, historical order aside, the most significant historical interpretation of that first section is Judaism, which in fact proscribed artistic representation of God. It is a transition of considerable interest—but not for us here—as this ancient art-religion of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom Egypt turns

56. Ibid., p. 318.

57. Ibid., p. 320.

to increasingly anthropomorphic images and "statues in human shape" but which do not speak (697).⁵⁸ Hegel is obviously fascinated by hieroglyphics, which were just being translated by Napoleon's archaeologists after he found the Rosetta Stone in 1799. (The three languages were Greek, hieroglyphics, and a simpler, reduced, demotic writing.) Hieroglyphic representations were for the most part pictorial, and the demotic inscriptions were already a move toward an alphabet and possibility of conceptual thought, or as Hegel puts it, "the hieroglyph of another meaning, of a thought" (695). He comments on the general integration of more primitive plant and animal forms into "more rigid and universal forms of thought" (694) and credits the Egyptians, in particular, with the attempt to overcome the dualism between mind and body (an odd claim, since that distinction was hardly apparent even in the Greeks, and more than a few philosophers have claimed that its origins are only in the 17th century).⁵⁹ But, in any case, this religion of the "taskmaster" *creates* its sacred images through art instead of simply finding them growing and running around in the woods, and this, in Hegel's anthropomorphic view, is a grand conceptual advance. The sacred object is no longer something found but something made by us, and from this, it is a short step to the realization that one is oneself sacred, not only as object or object-maker but, more essentially, as subject.

But, if we are to keep our parallel with the rest of the *Phenomenology*, how is "the taskmaster" to be understood with reference to the chapter on "Force and Understanding"? I think the answer is that the object so interpreted is but an "outer shape" which contains in its possession "an inner being" (696). Just as a scientific theory is constituted by us in order to discover (but in fact postulating) an inner "force" in the phenomena of nature, the "taskmaster" builds a pyramid to hold the soul of the Pharaoh, or creates a holy object to contain the soul of a god. Hegel's reference to "the black formless stone" is significant. Miller interprets this as the Black Stone of Kaaba (696n.) but the practice of worshipping stones is an extremely general practice to be found in many primitive religions, in ancient Greece and Rome as well as in Islam.⁶⁰ (The Kaaba Stone was in fact a meteorite, which was naturally taken to be a gift from Heaven. It is also a part

58. Hegel is not just referring to the general fact that statues do not speak; he is referring specifically to the Sphinx, whose silence plays a special role in ancient Greek mythology, in Oedipus in particular.

59. E.g., Gilbert Ryle in his *Concept of Mind* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1949) and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980).

60. John B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 20.

of Jewish mythology, however; it was Abraham who found the stone and the legend takes it back to Adam.)⁶¹ In worshipping stones, the distinction between the outer lifeless form and the inner spirit is far more obvious than in the worship of plants and animals, and it is in this distinction too that the effort to “unite the two moments of Spirit” (697) must be understood. This resembles in its basic form, at least, precisely what we found in the chapter on “Force and Understanding”—our own (conceptual) activities creating the distinction between inner and outer, postulating the inner, and then finding ourselves without an adequate conception of either the inner supersensible force or the role of our own contribution.

It is clear that the section on “the Taskmaster” is not intended to include only a single religion, although the religion of the ancient Egyptians is surely in evidence there. But Islam also seems to be included and so too any number of religions which worship things or idols of any kind and any size, and this would include Christian icon and relic worship just as much as the spectacular colossi created by the Pharaohs. Just as the first section on “light-religion” might most helpfully be interpreted to include an entire range of religions whose God is some Heavenly cosmic force—including Zoroastrianism and Judaism, and as “plant and animal” religion should be interpreted as including an entire range of religions whose objects are living creatures—or *all* living creatures—this section includes all of those religions (notably *excluding* Judaism in particular) which worship idols of their own making. Spirit is to be found in art, but this is not yet Spirit as Artist, in which it is the creative activity itself, rather than its lifeless object, which becomes the focus of religious enthusiasm.

The progression from the religion of light (Zoroastrianism) to the worship of plants and animals (Eastern pantheism) to the worship of man-made idols and then Greek art-religion has, as anticipated, a second kind of interpretation. Through the language darkly one can envision a set of forms more modern than the ancient religions; “light-religion” includes strong indications of a reference to modern Judaism as well as to Romantic intuitionism. The attack on pantheism is surely not confined to the ancient Eastern versions, and in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel advances precisely the same arguments against Hinduism and, one surmises, against all those modern pantheisms derived from Spinoza. The rejection of the “taskmaster” and art-religion too is surely not to be wholly dissociated from Schelling’s philosophy

61. Ibid. 688. In the context here, however, it may not be insignificant that the Rosetta stone, just alluded to, is also, in its general shape, a “black formless stone.” (It now resides in the British Museum.)

of art and religion, and Hegel's reconsideration of Greek religion is surely connected to his and Hölderlin's own prior enthusiasm. The rejection of that "Reason" which has no religious significance surely includes Deism, that heretical reduction of God to a hypothesis of physics, which Hegel had studied and rejected in school, and the chapter as a whole, written with its intentional vagueness, can be read as a survey and dismissal of contemporary rather than ancient religious views. Of course, as always, Hegel is concerned with conceptual forms, and it is not to be supposed that any one religion will fit into a single form precisely. (Judaism, for example, has elements of "light-religion," but it is surely partially contained in "revealed religion" too.) In turning to "art-religion" and the Greeks, it will be particularly important to keep in mind Schelling and Hölderlin, who only a few years before had joined with Hegel in resurrecting a renewed Attic art-religion of their own.

Spirit as Artist: Religion as Art

The turn to art-religion is, first of all, a turn from the Egyptian task-master who has his images built for him to the Greek artist who creates his own. This proletarian shift is paralleled by a number of theologically significant changes as well; the most important is the shift from silent idols (including the quasi-human sphinx) to the spoken word, which allows a consequent shift to self-conscious activity and expression. Hegel defines *language* as "an outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence" (710). It is by now a familiar image—language as a self-existent system which we internalize to give expression to ourselves. (Heidegger: "language is the house of being" and "language speaks through us."⁶²) It is through the verbal arts, drama, and poetry, that we come to express ourselves as Spirit. (Hieroglyphics, on the other hand, are not yet language insofar as they are not yet "blended with the shape of thought" (695).) This suggests an extremely important shift that is too often overlooked by readers of these passages.⁶³ Hegel is not here merely contrasting the Greek visual arts, especially the magnificent sculpture of the Greek gods and goddesses, with the more primitive decorations of the Egyptians. The triumph of Greek art and religion is distinctively verbal. Hegel does

62. See, for instance, J.L. Mehta, *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), esp. pp. 223–43; and Charles Guignon, "Heidegger on Language," in *The Monist*, 1981.

63. E.g., John Findlay in his "Analysis," p. 590.

include and discuss the visual arts, but as a distinctively inferior and "abstract" form of art. It is Sophocles, not Polyclitus, who gives Spirit its shape here.

It is important to avoid thinking of art as an instrument or a vehicle of expression which sometimes *happens* to be used for religious feeling. Throughout his career, Hegel treats art as *essentially* an expression of the Absolute and therefore tied to religion.⁶⁴ It is not as if art were one form of human activity which, in Greece and the ancient world, became enlisted in the service of religion. Art as such, as Schelling had argued too, was the expression of Spirit, whether or not this was appreciated by the artist.⁶⁵ And though it is not discussed in the *Phenomenology* in any detail, it is clear that art too is to be "transcended" in favor of some "higher representation", that is, through concepts as such (702). This means that the functions of art give way to philosophy, and art presumably loses a dominant place in our lives. In our times, this is indeed a very real question—what apart from decoration and a peculiarly profound form of entertainment, should the arts be? But for Hegel, the arts were not at all "aesthetic," much less simple craftsmanship ("instinctive fashioning of material" (*ibid.*)); art is spiritual expression. In a society fulfilled by "the Concept," art no longer has a primary spiritual function. *Exit* "art as reason itself" (Delacroix). *Incipit* commercial art, Muzak, and "art for art's sake."

In art-religion, "spirit has raised the shape in which it is present . . . and produces such a shape for itself" (699). But here it is clear that we have skipped several stages of the *Phenomenology*, including the whole of "Self-Consciousness" (ignoring for the moment the craftsmanship of the slave) and the whole of "Reason" too, which Hegel has already told us has no religious connections. In art-religion, we find ourselves squarely in the middle of Spirit and *Sittlichkeit*, "the free people ("nation") in whom hallowed custom constitutes the substance of all, whose actuality and existence everyone knows to be his own will and deed" (700). This is where the "arrangement of forms" is indeed varied from the structure of the book in general, in order for Hegel to put in historical order first the Greeks and then medieval philosophy and Christianity. The point to be made, of course, is that the Greeks made their very lives into art and religion, that religion

64. See, e.g., *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics* ("Aesthetics"), trans. T.M. Knox, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), and the introductory essay by Charles Karelis. Art is the ideal unification of the "universal and particular," and thus its representational content is always more important than its form (esp. pp. 75 ff).

65. *Ibid.*, p. 25f. One can anticipate Hegel's opinion of the "art for art's sake" movement that begins in the later part of his century.

for them was first of all "folk-religion," a community unity rather than a set of doctrines or the worship of anything outside themselves.⁶⁶ Even the gods were among them, took part in their ceremonies, and chose sides in battle, not at all like the distant God of the Hebrews and the Persians, who intervened on occasion but by no means was to be thought of in human shape and with human all-too-human weaknesses. Art for the Greeks was the expression of their own community, their legends, their heroes, their feasts and good fortunes. Religion too was an expression of community, and so art, religion, and tribal life were all of a piece, not, as in modern times, separate human concerns with "specialists" in different, often antagonistic, disciplines. Life was "absolute levity" and "joyfulness," "the consummation of the ethical sphere" (701).

It was not out of "joyfulness," however, that the Greeks became the master artists and the most profound spokesmen for Spirit. In a precociously Nietzschean analysis, Hegel argues that Greek art and religion become self-consciously realized only when that mythical unity had been lost.⁶⁷ "Spirit, inwardly sure of itself, mourns over the loss of its world" (ibid.). Art thus becomes a form of salvation, a striving after a unity that has been lost, the translation of misfortune into *pathos* and pathos taken up as the material for art (702). "How much these people must have suffered," Nietzsche exclaims years later, "to be so beautiful".⁶⁸ Greek art, Hegel tells us, truly begins as "absolute art" only with the breakdown of community, in which "out of the purity of self it (Spirit) creates its own essence which is raised above the real world" (701). *Antigone* thus becomes the representation of Greek life as such (704), and it is in this light that we should remember Schiller's rhetorical query—"How is it that the individual Greek was able to be the representative of his [her] age?"⁶⁹ In Greek tragedy, and comedy too, every individual has "the positive power of universality" (704), and it is thus that the Greeks approach, but do not yet reach, that absolute sense of unity that Hegel, with the Greeks as his ideal, spends his life trying to find.

The discussion of art-religion is divided up into three separate stages, whose logic is strange even within the context of the *Phenomenology*. The three divisions are "the abstract work of art," "the living work of art," and "the spiritual work of art." Only parts of the first and third

66. See Harris, *Hegel's Development*, p. 390f.

67. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966).

68. Ibid. Also, "Homer's Contest" (1872) trans. W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954).

69. *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, p. 322.

divisions are ostensibly about “art” as such; the second division is about festivals and Dionysian revels, Greek warriors and athletes, “art” only in that very general sense in which anything of beauty, whether man-made or not, might be called “art.” In Hegel’s later *Philosophy of Religion*, the parallel chapter “Spiritual Individuality” is divided up as “the religion of sublimity,” “the religion of beauty,” and “the religion of utility or of understanding.”⁷⁰ These correspond more to the movement in the first stage than to the three divisions of the *Phenomenology* as such. In Hegel’s later lectures on art, however, he divides up the arts into three general categories: *architecture* (making the world comfortable to us); *sculpture* (which gives shape to inert matter and makes it like us); and what he calls *community* (which includes music, painting, and poetry). Poetry, finally, is “the most spiritual presentation of romantic art,” “the highest stage” in which “art transcends itself” and “passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought.”⁷¹ Since Hegel here is discussing not only his view of Greek religion but his analysis of the arts and Greek culture as well, these later writings may be of some help to us.⁷²

The first thing to be said about “abstract art” is that its meaning for Hegel is the very opposite of its meaning for us. “Abstract” art is art that is too particular, that does not fit in with the rest of human life except as an *object* for devotion or appreciation. Thus a Greek statue is a clear example of “abstract art,” though in our terms it would not be abstract at all. Hegel argues that, as an individual representation, a single statue of a god or goddess or mythical figure is an inferior work of art—no matter how brilliantly executed—precisely because it is not enough of a reflection of self. It does have human form, which is a monumental advance over the icons and sculptured plants and animals of more idolatrous religions, but it is still too much “other,” too silent, too non-conceptual. The argument here is repeated in Hegel’s later *Lectures on Aesthetics*—that the “highest” arts are the most conceptually expressive arts, poetry in particular. (Later, the hierarchy will be reversed by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who will place music at the top, as “most spiritual,” just because it is so non-conceptual.) The argument, it is worth noting, resembles the argument in the “zoo” section of chapter 5; the problem of the artist (the sculptor, for example) is that familiar antagonism between “inner” intentions and the “outer” product. But here, unlike the “zoo,” the problem is one of expression of the truly universal, the creation of an art-work

70. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 170–219, 224–88, 288–323.

71. *Aesthetics*, p. 89.

72. Harris, p. xxviii.

that is wholly “selfless” (in the individual sense), inspired by the Absolute as its own expression and not the particular work of a particular artist (708). The limitation is the limitation of the medium, not the artist or his abilities. A statue is always just a statue. It is always “out there,” a mere object. And thus the search for an expression of unity—the aim of absolute art—moves to the verbal arts. (Not surprisingly, we might add, Greek mythology itself is filled with statues that speak, come to life, and participate in the lives of their creators. Pygmalion and Galatea provide the most dramatic example.)

A statue may resemble a man, but it is not yet “like himself” (709). For that, we need “another element of existence”—*language*, “an outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence” (710). The first role of language in art is the *Oracle*, and here it is clear that “art” is no longer confined to that somewhat truncated discipline that we (not Hegel) call “the history of art.” The Oracle is the language of religion and the Absolute, but as an *alien* voice (ibid.). What is more it is a voice (too much like Hegel) that speaks in riddles and opacities. More important is the use of language in the transmission of epic poetry, Homer in particular. The Spirit speaks through Homer and the Homerids not as individuals but as Greek universality as such. (I read “the spirit of Sunrise” as an opaque allusion to Homer’s “rosy fingered dawn” (711).) The epic has a substantial content but is full of details, which “appear trivial to the progressively developing self-consciousness” (ibid.). From Homer’s epic poetry the Greeks learned to distinguish the mere details of the story from the essential human truth within it. Here we find the golden age of Greek theater, concerned not with details but with “the sure and unwritten law of the gods.” The oracle becomes “individuality in general,” not an alien voice but “peculiar to the god who is the spirit of an ethical people (*sittliche Volkes*),” whose speech “is no longer alien to it but their own” (712). Finally, Greek language becomes fully conceptual in “that wise man of old” (Socrates) who “searched his own thought for what is true and beautiful” (ibid.). Thus it is that the essentials of Spirit are to be found in oneself, and the ultimate wisdom of the (Delphic) oracle becomes “Know Thyself.”

At this point, the discussion takes a violent turn. Having summarized the history of Greek verbal representation from Homer to Socrates in a few opaque sentences, Hegel now turns back to what (in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion*) he takes to be the basic form of all religion—the *cult*. This is, I think, the “community” (in primitive form) of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and in it the various arts are all expressions of and joint activities of the group. Hegel’s example is

"the stream of sacred song" (715) which is exemplified by the Judeo-Christian ritual of the "hymn" but in this context more likely refers to the song of the Greek chorus, the theatrical device for representing the voice of the community in Greek drama.⁷³ The chorus, as opposed to the statue, is no longer "out there" but is identical to the activity of the community as such (713–14). (It is of some significance that the chorus itself is not the composition of any particular writer, and even in the plays, the lines of the chorus are usually familiar warnings and judgments of the community (734).)

The discussion of "cult" that is discussed as "religion in general" in the later *Lectures* is transferred here to the realm of the Greeks. What Hegel takes to be the essence of all spirituality is this sense of community, but in particular *self-conscious* community. Here in the *Phenomenology* he repeats his early analysis of 1793, of Greek folk-religion as a set of rituals and rites instead of the mere abstract theology of Christianity. In that early essay on "Folk Religion," this cult of rituals emerged clearly superior to Christianity; here, and in the later lectures, this is no longer clear at all.

The "living work of art" seems to be neither religion nor art, as we would understand those terms. Hegel repeats with some relish his early fantasies concerning Greek Bacchanalia and festivals (720–26), complete with the loss of consciousness and giddy whirl that he also celebrated in the Preface of the *Phenomenology* (47), in which each individual loses him or herself in the festivities and in which—one can see Hegel's fantasies flickering—"a crowd of frenzied females" represent "the untamed revelry of Nature" (723). But Hegel ultimately rejects the "mysteries" of these ancient rites and recommends as superior the more straightforward worship of the Greek athlete, as handsome as a statue, perhaps, but not "out there" like a statue; he is one of us. His powers are our own. Art and religion become corporeal but, Hegel adds, too much so. In this sweaty secularism we have lost the spirituality with which religion is essentially concerned, and so we return, under the guise of "the spiritual work of art," to literature, the "highest expression of Spirit" and a form of communion that is wholly "conscious of the universality of its human existence" (726).

H.S. Harris tells us in some detail how Hegel devoted much of his youth, most of his studies, and much of his life to Greek literature,⁷⁴ and it is with that in mind that we should read "the spiritual work of art" (727–47). Here Hegel gives us in extremely condensed form some

73. See Findlay, "Analysis," p. 581; Harris, pp. 234–38.

74. Harris, pp. 47–48.

twenty years of reading and thinking about the Greek epic, the Greek gods (keeping in mind that Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling once tried to revive a religion with Zeus at its head), the chorus of Greek tragedy and the nature of tragedy itself, the relationship between tragedy and comedy and, specifically, the plight of Antigone and the irony of Socrates. There are even references (so disguised that they are hard to confirm) to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (737).⁷⁵

The epic, Hegel tells us, is a kind of "picture-thinking" which (as we have been told in the "abstract art" section) is less than thought and more of a sequence of details which, nevertheless, represent the unity of the whole through a single individual ("the Minstrel," "the Middle Term") (728–31). Gods and men, goddesses and women, battle all together, the various factions in fact representing an underlying unity and each individual in fact represents different aspects of spiritual forces in general. In the epic, Hegel tells us, the real content of the story is to be found primarily on the human level, while the gods and goddesses, for the most part, are largely comic. And behind the seemingly chaotic sequence of events for both mortals and gods, there lurks *Fate* or *Necessity*, in fact "the Concept." In the epic, this necessity—like the minstrel (Homer) who tells the story—is not brought into the picture. The graduation from epic poetry to tragedy, accordingly, is making explicit both fate and the role of the narrator (732–33).

Tragedy, according to Hegel, is about necessity.⁷⁶ The chorus, representing the community, express foreboding, horror, and pity, but they are resigned to fate. The individuals in the drama, however, are not so wise or so resigned; they fight against their fate, even as they struggle to find out what it is. Tragedy, accordingly, is this conflict of determination and necessity, the conflict of opposing rights and duties. Hegel is quite openly opposing the standard "tragic flaw" view of tragedy that has come down to us from Aristotle's *Poetics*, but at the same time he is advancing his own theory on a similarly limited basis, the Oedipus cycle in particular. (The clash of duties and the obscurity of fate particularly well characterizes the themes of *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.) In any case, Hegel's analysis takes this clash of duties, forces equally right, to be the essence of tragedy and the result, inevitably, is the death of the individual, or absolution from guilt, but in either case the return to "the repose of the whole, the unmoved

75. *Hamlet* is explicitly mentioned (vis-à-vis Yorick's skull) in *PG*, 333, but not in this section.

76. On Hegel on tragedy, see Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

unity of fate, the peaceful existence and consequent inactivity and lack of vitality of family and government . . . the return of spiritual life into the unitary being of Zeus" (740).

Opposed to the deep, troubling antagonisms of fate in tragedy, in which Zeus and necessity strike us as alien impositions into human happiness, comedy reduces everything to ridiculousness, even, especially, the gods. Comedy delights in exposing hypocrisy ("the contrast between the universal as a theory and that with which practice is concerned" (745) and exposes both the pettiness of individuals and the contempt of individuals for the universal order (*ibid.*). The striking role of comedy here in the *Phenomenology*, immediately preceding "Revealed Religion," should give us warning; Christianity for Hegel cannot be the gloomy and certainly humorless schizoid sensibilities of the "Unhappy Consciousness," if, that is, Christianity is the "revealed religion." If we take the order of the dialectic with any seriousness, Greek comedy, this disdain for the gods and rendering them (as well as ourselves) ridiculous, is as close as we have come (so far) to the Absolute. One here senses Goethe's great cosmic joke and the laugh of Mephistopheles far more than the seriousness of the theologians and the sufferings of Christ.

But comedy plays another role in the realization of Spirit, according to Hegel, and, curiously enough, it is also the backdrop against which Hegel presents us with the "wise man of old," the greatest philosopher (in Hegel's early writings)—Socrates. It is the ironic spirit of comedy which allows the Sophists to reject all that has been given to them, to refute all arguments put before them, and expose "the vanishing of the absolute validity previously attaching to [ethical laws and maxims]" (746). It is this same sense of irony that lets Socrates too, far from being the mere opponent of the Sophists, refute even the sophistry of the Sophists and prepare the way for his own positive theories of the Beautiful and the Good.

Rational *thinking* frees the divine Being from its contingent shape and, in antithesis to the unthinking wisdom of the Chorus which produces all sorts of ethical maxims . . . lifts these into simple Ideas of the Beautiful and the Good. (*Ibid.*)

Socrates, like the Sophists but going beyond them, recognizes "the movement of this abstraction (as) the dialectic contained in the maxims and the laws themselves" (*ibid.*). In his dialogues, he uses "Socratic irony" to turn the "pure thoughts of the Beautiful and the Good" into "a comic spectacle." It is not the wisdom of Socrates that is on display here so much as the disintegration of *Sittlichkeit* and naïve

ethical certainty under the onslaught of the Sophists. Socrates' bold questions—like the Sophists' cynicism—was symptomatic of the breakdown of Greek harmony, as Nietzsche later argued too.⁷⁷ The laws and maxims of morality are “liberated” from *Sittlichkeit* and become “empty opinions,” “the caprice of chance individuality” (ibid.) replaced only by the “clouds” of Socrates' Forms (“Ideas”).⁷⁸ Hegel is thus once again repeating the key step in his dialectic, from individuality to *Sittlichkeit*, but now it is being played for us in its proper historical order, that is, backwards. It is the split between the individual and the ethical whole—whether in the misery of unhappy consciousness and tragedy or the ridiculousness and mockery of comedy—which destroys that easy innocence. The point of the Sophists—with which Hegel ends this section, is that even the Absolute is at the “mercy” of our own self-consciousness. We create our gods and the Good and the Beautiful; thus they are rendered impotent and empty. And so Hegel ends with a warning, that however satisfying this comic attitude may be, it is not the whole of life:⁷⁹

this self-certainty is a state of spiritual well-being and repose therein, such as is not to be found anywhere outside of this Comedy. (747)

Now *what*, you should ask, does any of this have to do with religion? That is just the point; religion, for Hegel, has little to do with the rather specific and highly speculative doctrines that we call by that honorific name. Greek comedy is just as much religion as Sunday Mass, and Homer is just as much a holy text as the Bible. Religion is that search for unity that characterizes every intelligent society in social and conceptual disarray. “Alienation,” in this perspective, is primarily a religious concept, and tragedy and comedy *together* represent the two sides of our remedy for alienation—the one, seeing ourselves as universally determined by one and the same shared “Fate” (or Fates), the other, seeing the ridiculousness of ourselves in our seriousness. But both provide us with a sense of unity, that is, as spectators, at least. But then again, we are not just spectators—in either tragedy or comedy—or in Spirit.

Though Hegel seems to find a certain “levity” in the proposition “The Self is absolute Being” (748), I must confess that I miss the joke.

77. Esp. *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, pp. 463–564, “The Problem of Socrates,” pp. 473–79.

78. The reference to “Clouds” is presumably an allusion to Aristophanes' mocking comedy about Socrates by that name.

79. The warning that comedy is contained within its own sphere might perhaps better apply to that later German genius, Hermann Hesse, who in *Steppenwolf*, at least, tends to pursue a cosmic view of the “comic” in just this sense. Hegel is also so interpreted, attractively, by Joshua Læwenberg in his *Hegel's Phenomenology*.

But the levity raises the question that confronts him once again, as it had earlier in his career: the question of Christianity. How does Christianity or “revealed religion” fit into human life? How does it fit in the history of religion? How does it serve to unify us all as “Spirit,” when its history shows so clearly that its secular consequences have been to divide us and set ourselves against each other? How can Hegel, a German writing at the height of the new secular era, see his way past the horrors and destruction of the Thirty Years War, which had destroyed Germany a century and a half before in its bloody confrontation of Christians against Christians?

In both the *Phenomenology* and the later lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel is obviously attempting to minimize the importance of Greek *Volk*-religion, *vis-à-vis* Christianity, in contrast with his own critical attacks on modern religion in his early writings. Greek religion is now viewed as a primitive anticipation of Christianity (“Spirit has not yet sacrificed itself as *self-conscious* Spirit to self-consciousness, and the mystery of bread and wine [in Dionysian festivals] is not yet the mystery of flesh and blood” (724).

It is at this point that the *Phenomenology* turns to Christianity, as “Revealed Religion” (748). But before we join Hegel in that turn, let us look for a moment at the later lectures, where Hegel divides up “Spiritual Individuality” in quite a different way, as we mentioned before. The three sub-forms there, “the religion of sublimity,” “the religion of beauty,” and “the religion of Utility or of the understanding” are perhaps more parallel to the structure of the *Phenomenology* than the divisions in the *Phenomenology* chapter, and in any case, more historical and more informative. The three divisions in the lectures correspond, respectively, to Jewish religion, Greek religion, and Roman religion.⁸⁰ We have already noted that Judaism is given no clearly delineated position in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, surely a curiosity given Hegel’s own background. (“Old Testament Religion,” for example, finds a most prominent place in Hegel’s early model, Lessing’s *Education of Mankind*). It is worth noting that, in the lectures as they were delivered in Berlin in 1827, Hegel switched the order of Jewish and Greek religion and treated Greek religion as a step to Judaism. Hegel praises Judaism for its “demythologizing,” and the Old Testament is retained as the most important presupposition and anticipation of “revealed religion.” Roman religion, on the other hand, is given the optimum position in the dialectic but is treated as religiously empty. It is, in fact, the ancient equivalent of the Enlighten-

80. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 170ff, 224ff, 288ff.

ment in modern times, a *rejection* of the religious consciousness (which finds itself at a disadvantage in its relations with this powerful secularism), not in the name of Reason but in the name of *utility*. It is this conflict between Jewish faith and Roman pragmatism that sets the stage for their ultimate confrontation and transcendence. The secular impotence and infinite power of the Jewish God confront the secular power and spiritual impotence of the Roman empire—both entering their age of decadence in the period in question—and the consequence is a new synthesis. The Jewish religion, faced with the fateful “disharmony” of God against man that Hegel first criticized in his early manuscripts and later made the basis of the “Unhappy Consciousness” of the *Phenomenology*, makes too little of man. The Greek religion, “the religion of humanity,” makes “confidence in the gods at the same time human self-confidence,”⁸¹ but Rome takes this secularization to the ultimate conclusion and destroys both human confidence and religion. This was not true, of course, in its adolescence of restless empire-building. By the time of Herod, however, Rome was already falling into disillusionment, and at the same time that the Jewish people were finding their lot on earth inadequately served by their faith. The time was ripe for Christ—the synthesis of Jewish transcendence and Greek self-confidence—the formulation of a religious mythology which combines the infinite “Other” and the finite self-conscious self in a single representation. And so we turn, at last, to “revealed” or “absolute religion.”

“Revealed Religion” (Christianity?)

If this effort [to render Christianity plausible] were to succeed, then would this effort have the ironic fate that on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity.
—Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

It is time to account for our original claim—that Hegel is not a Christian and his philosophy is only a pretense of Christian apologetics. This account can best be completed in two stages: first, it can be shown that “revealed religion” in the *Phenomenology* is *not* orthodox Christianity, but that Christianity appears and is “sublated” in at least two preceding sections of the dialectic. Second, we must spell out our claim

81. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

that the key doctrines of Christian theology, the Trinity and incarnation, Original Sin and the immortality of the Soul, are utterly devoid of Christian content in Hegel's analysis.

In our account of the religious dialectic we have avoided every attempt to single out the particularly Christian elements of its various forms. The essence of religion, we have seen, is its appeal to the infinite or Absolute, to a whole that is greater than ourselves. This Absolute is ultimately Spirit, and Spirit, once adequately realized, should abandon the religious "picture-thinking" which always falls short of its goal (787). But now, what is the essence of Christianity? As a religion, in Hegel's sense, it must consist of an appeal to the Absolute, and as Christianity, it must represent this Absolute in terms of an identity of God and man, *in a particular instance*. Thus, Christianity is a special attempt to reconcile the finite self with the infinite Absolute, an attempt which necessarily involves the notion of "incarnation." Thus Judaism attempted to reconcile the finite and infinite through feeling, study and prayer, the Greeks attempted to do so through art, and the Romans through their state. But only Christianity, according to Hegel, involves this very special notion of historical identity, not the Greek and Roman gods appearing as men (also as bulls, swans, and doves), but God *existing as* a man. The chapter on "Religion" explicitly returns to the beginning of the *Phenomenology* in order to give (or try to give) every form of consciousness a religious interpretation. In the section "Revealed Religion," Hegel takes us back to the beginning once again, this time with a particularly Christian outlook. How, in the dialectic of forms we have traversed so far, is the Christian identity of God and man to be traced? The answer, of course, begins with "Unhappy Consciousness," and Hegel repeats his analysis of that earlier treatment here (748–53), in contrast to the comic consciousness we have just discussed. (We remember in the early essays too, how Hegel repeatedly played off Socrates against Jesus, as well as folk religion against Christianity). Both comic consciousness and unhappy consciousness see their world reduced to absurdity, but the former as a cosmic joke, the latter as sheer misery (752). Hegel tells us that the one consciousness is in fact "the counterpart and completion of the other" (752) and revolves around opposite sides of the same antagonism between the individual consciousness and the Absolute; in comedy the Absolute is at the mercy of the individual, while in unhappy Christianity the individual is at the mercy of the Absolute (748, 749). Consequently, the comic consciousness sees itself as the Absolute (747) and "is perfectly happy within itself" (752) while the unhappy consciousness has lost all reason for living, lost all respect for itself and

the laws and ethics in general (753). Do we need a dialectical argument to tell us which is preferable?

The argument does not stop here, however; it has just begun. Hegel steps back still further and describes for us once again the break-up of society in which the comic consciousness flourished (750) and along with it the escapist philosophies of Stoicism and Skepticism (750–51) which provided the conceptual framework for the Christian worldview (754). It would be naïve not to see here too the elements of social unrest among the Jews under Rome, though they are not mentioned. Here is the crucible in which Christianity was born; alienated Rome, eternity minded-philosophers, restless Jews awaiting for “the birth of self-consciousness.” “All conditions are ready for Spirit to recognize itself as Spirit” (753–54). In the midst of arrogant Roman secularism—“The Self as such is Absolute Being” (750) and “Stoic independence of thought” (ibid.)—we find the truth in “that shape which we have called the Unhappy Self-Consciousness” (751). So before we enter “Revealed Religion” as such, let us go back in the *Phenomenology* and see how Christianity has already been covered, first as “Unhappy Consciousness” in chapter 4, and then, in the person of Jesus Himself, as the “beautiful soul” in chapter 6.

CHRISTIANITY AS “UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS”

“Unhappy Consciousness (206–30) or *das unglückliches Bewusstsein* is a consciousness divided against itself, half master, half slave—the master the alien sense of “the Unchangeable,” the eternal, God; the slave the “wretched” “changeable” being of flesh and blood who longs for a union with the Unchangeable. There can be no doubt that “Unhappy Consciousness” is orthodox Christianity, which takes both God and Christ to be something “other” than oneself. The question is, what is the scope of the chapter and how much of Christianity does it include? The several “triplets” in the chapter make recognition of the Trinity and the traditional Catholic church unmistakable⁸², but how much more than this? How much of this chapter is theology and metaphysics? And how much is it rather—in keeping with the title “Self-Consciousness”—a description of a certain form of consciousness, in which the nature of its objects is of secondary interest? What is “Unhappy Consciousness” about?

The analysis of “Unhappy Consciousness” turns on two contrasts

82. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 99.

and two progressions of three. The language is sufficiently convoluted so that many readers are relieved just to recognize the Trinity and be done with it, but it is not the Trinity as such that is being discussed here. First, however, let us introduce the two sets of contrasts:

changeable (and unessential) consciousness
versus

Unchangeable (essential) consciousness

and, from the earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*:

universal

and

particular.

With these two sets of contrasts, Hegel discusses the story of the Judeo-Christian tradition and our various attitudes toward the Unchangeable. The resultant matrix includes the Universal Unchangeable (God), the particular Unchangeable (Christ), the universal changeable (which will eventually be Spirit, as "reconciliation of individuality with the universal") (210), and the particular changeable, which is each of us, in our animal, wretched, earthly condition.

The first progression is clearly identifiable as the Trinity, but it is more accurately described as three different views of our "link with the Unchangeable"—

1. as opposed to the Unchangeable . . . thrown back to the beginning of the struggle which is throughout the element in which the whole relationship subsists. (210)
2. consciousness learns that individuality belongs to the Unchangeable itself, so that it assumes the form of individuality into which the entire mode of existence passes. (Ibid.)
3. it finds its own self as this particular individual in the Unchangeable. (Ibid.)

The first is God the Old Testament Father, an alien Being who passes judgment upon us, threatens us, and reduces us (as Hegel had argued in his early writings) to slaves.⁸³ The second is the incarnation of God as Christ. Third is the holy spirit, which allows us to "experience the joy of finding ourselves therein." What concerns Hegel here is not the metaphysics of the dissected God, however, but the marked difference in attitudes that each of these views represents; the first is a projection of an almighty God that, as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard agree, can only make us feel pathetic in comparison. Furthermore, as an alien consciousness, we have no idea "how the latter will behave," no doubt a reference to the whimsical and unpredictable nature of

83. In "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 182f.

the Old Testament Jehovah (211). The second view represents a vision of God as “one of us” but, at the same time, still “other” and “alien,” and “the hope of becoming one with it must remain a hope, i.e. without fulfillment and present fruition” (212). Hegel also raises the then serious worry among theologians about how a “contingent moment” in history could have eternal significance, and how Christ’s appearance almost 2000 years ago, in a very distant land, could count for us now, since “in the world of time it has vanished, and in space it had a remote existence and remains utterly remote” (*ibid.*). The third view, on the other hand, is exactly what Hegel wants to defend, as the unity of ourselves with God, but, accordingly, he does not discuss it at all in this chapter.⁸⁴

The second progression is a series of attempts to unify ourselves with the Unchangeable;

1. through purity of consciousness. (214)
2. through work, as a particular, living, desiring individual (*Ibid.*).
3. as consciousness aware of its own being-for-itself (*Ibid.*).

It is not difficult to see these three attempts as encompassing the whole domain of Christianity; the first is traditional Catholicism, and Hegel’s sarcasm is unbridled (“the chaotic jingling of bells, a mist of warm incense, a musical thinking that does not get as far as the Concept . . .”) (217). The effort to unify one’s lowly changeable existence with the Unchangeable here is a withdrawal into oneself through pure feeling or “devotion” (*ibid.*). But inevitably, unhappily, one falls back to the “inessential,” *mere* feeling, which is fleeting and utterly changeable. In desperation, Hegel adds, this sort of consciousness seeks a tangible object for its devotion, and so seeks “the form of an object,” an *icon* or, ideally, the tangible actuality of Christ. In a particularly opaque reference, Hegel says that “Consciousness can only find as its present reality the *grave* of its life,” which commentators generally agree, on the basis of very little evidence, (“the struggle of an enterprise doomed to failure” (*ibid.*)) refers to the Holy Crusades of the 11th to 13th centuries.⁸⁵ What is clear is that Hegel considers the search for physical icons the symptom of a deep failing in Catholicism itself—its devotion to a single, contingent, historical event. This in turn leads to a self-defeating dependency on the church and other tangible symbols of God, rather than God—or the Unchangeable itself.

84. The third stage might well be viewed as the new “enlightened” religion envisioned by Lessing in his *Education of Mankind*, but one should not assume too quickly that it is identical to “revealed religion” in chapter 7.

85. E.g., Findlay, *Hegel* p. 99; and Baillie, in his translation of the *PG*, p. 258.

The second attempt is the religion of "good works," from Pelagius in the 4th century to much of secularized Protestantism, where the withdrawal from the world is replaced by a new enthusiasm for the world itself as "sanctified" (219) and by *activity* (218). For the "pure consciousness" the world itself was a "nullity," but for the active consciousness this is not the case. The modern Christian enjoys life and work; he sees his mission as *changing* the world (220). For this ability to enjoy and work this energetic consciousness "gives thanks" to the Unchangeable and "denies itself the satisfaction of being conscious of its independence," even "renounces itself" (222). It is a familiar picture for us—the secular Christian missionary, working for fame and fortune (often on television) in the name of Christ. But here Hegel's early criticisms emerge once again against this duplicity of both acting and renouncing, doing deeds but not ultimately taking responsibility for them and, in true Nietzschean form, he claims that the whole business of renunciation, which does indeed give one a sense of "unity with the Unchangeable" (*ibid.*), is exactly the opposite of what it pretends to be—a renunciation. The very act of renunciation, in all of its self-righteousness, is at the same time an arrogant act of self-assertion. Here is the dilemma of the self-consciously Christian businessman, who claims dependence on God and "gives thanks" for his success but at the same time takes pride in his being a "self-made man." At some point, he may well feel either that his claims to success are fraudulent, or, that the pretense of dependency is a sham and renunciation the furthest thing from his self-made mind.⁸⁶

The third form of consciousness, accordingly, is the renewed realization that worldly success cannot be made compatible with this uncompromising self-denying view, that every success is a "vanity" that draws us further away from the unity with the Unchangeable, and that the only way to unify oneself with the Unchangeable is to deny oneself completely. This is the ascetic religious consciousness, which also plays such an important role in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* many years later.⁸⁷ The Catholic consciousness tried to ignore itself in devotion to the Unchangeable consciousness; the second, more secular form of consciousness devoted itself mainly to its life and its work, with peripheral "thanks" to God. But now, the ascetic self sees itself

86. The obvious affinity here is Kierkegaard's harsh attacks on "Christendom" throughout his philosophy but particularly in his *Journals*, and his later (1854) *Attack on Christendom* (Princeton Univ. Press, trans. W. Lowrie, 1944):

"The fault with the monastery was not asceticism, celibacy, etc.; no, the fault was that Christianity had been moderated by making the admission that all this was to be considered extraordinarily Christian—and the purely secular nonsense to be considered ordinary Christianity."

87. Translated by Kaufmann, part iii. Also in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as "the despisers of the body" (Part I, sec. 4).

as the enemy, the "*Fiend*," as "flesh," as "vile," as "petty" and "wretched." This is the truly unhappy consciousness, the morbid life of religion described by Kierkegaard or Augustine on their worst days. This final form of the unhappy consciousness attempts to deny itself altogether. It gives away its property (since property, in the thinking of the time, was definitive of selfhood too). It fasts and mortifies the flesh. It is particularly repulsed by "its awareness of itself in its animal functions" (225) which are "no longer performed naturally and without embarrassment" (*ibid.*). In them, "the enemy reveals himself in his characteristic shape" (*ibid.*) and so he sees himself "defiled" and impoverished and becomes a "brooding, wretched" self, as unhappy as is imaginable (*ibid.*).

The compensation for this misery, however, is "consciousness of its unity with the Unchangeable" (226). The attempted destruction of the self is "mediated by the thought of the Unchangeable" and this, in a familiar pathological sense, has some success. The argument would seem to be that, in the frenzy of total self-denial, which is wholly negative, there is a positive consciousness of gain on the side of the Unchangeable; as there is less and less of one's worldly self, there is more and more room for one's divine soul—assuming, that is, that selfhood is a kind of vacuum and that the Unchangeable soul is capable of filling it.

Hegel takes an odd twist here, which suggests, at least, that all of "Unhappy Consciousness" remains within the realm of the early church; Christ, by way of the church, again appears (227–30) and heartens this most unhappy ascetic consciousness by giving advice and, in effect, taking all responsibility for our actions and our fate on Himself. In the realm of the church, we renounce our actions and our enjoyments; we are encouraged to give up our property; we are told to say "what is meaningless" (228) and "practice what we don't understand" (229). Here, in other words, is everything Hegel hated about Christianity as a youth, its "positivity" (authoritarianism), its senseless jargon and catechism, its denial of our responsibility for our actions and our autonomy of thinking; and most of all, the church turns us into something less than human, into a "thing" (229) ascribing all of this degradation as "a gift from above" (*ibid.*).⁸⁸ It may be, as Christians have often said, that theirs is a religion—perhaps the only religion—in which God actually reaches down to his people instead of

88. And from the other side,

Men thus corrupt, men who have despised themselves from the moral point of view, even though in other respects they prided themselves on being God's favorites, were bound to create the doctrine of the corruption of human nature and adopt it gladly.

(The Positivity-essay, pp. 159–60).

requiring them to one-sidedly reach up to him. But Hegel's view of this virtue is unmistakable—that the very idea of a God “above” and alien to us is a miserable misunderstanding of the Absolute, and we shall see this criticism invoked again and again, as an error in “picture-thinking,” in the chapter on “Revealed Religion” as such.

Although the time sequence is backward, one could not do better than to see “the unhappy consciousness” as best exemplified by Kierkegaard.⁸⁹ The Danish existentialist's conception of “becoming a Christian” is precisely this third and ultimate phase of “unhappy consciousness,” the resignation and willingness to abandon oneself, “to fill one's consciousness with meaningless ideas and phrases,” to voluntarily “disclaim all power to independent self-existence,” but nevertheless retain the awareness of “its own resolve” and “its own self-constituted content.” Kierkegaard would agree with Hegel that the church is “positive” or authoritarian, and he would insist that the “resolve” must be formulated directly before God without this corrupted “ministering agency.” But Kierkegaard would ultimately reject the entire “cult” and “communal” dimension of Hegel's religion, and he would insist that the “representations” of Christianity, whether they be icons or theological treatises, are ultimately irrelevant to the faith. What is left, therefore, is feeling and devotion, but not the simple innocent feeling of Hegel's first phase. It is rather the anguish and “unhappiness” that comes in the ultimate phase. Hegel now takes his dialectic onto happier ground, first to the idealistic and self-confident world of science, then to the increasingly spiritual world of the community. Kierkegaard insists upon remaining in “Self-Consciousness,” indignantly “individual,” stubbornly “unhappy,” and belligerently opposed to just that sense of community ultimately deified by Hegel. Kierkegaard refers to Hegel's Spirit as “the Crowd,” “the Public,” the “collective Idea,” “the Christian hordes” and variously compares them to geese, sheep, and factory products.⁹⁰

It is at this point that the dialectic finds religious consciousness intolerable and flees to the happy refuge of science. It would be strange, to say the least, if we were to return back to this same “unhappy” phase once we have had our taste of it. In fact, we do not. This is the last we will see of traditional Christianity. Kierkegaard complained

89. “Christianity is certainly not melancholy; it is, on the contrary, glad tidings—for the melancholy.” Kierkegaard, *Journals* (1843).

90. “Thus it was established by the state as a kind of eternal principle that every child is naturally born a Christian . . . so, it took it upon itself to produce Christians. . . . So the state delivered, generation after generation, an assortment of Christians; each bearing the manufacturer's trademark of the state, with perfect accuracy one Christian exactly like all the others. . . . the point of Christianity became: the greatest possible uniformity of a factory product” Kierkegaard, (*Papirer*, XI, A12).

that Hegel had given up Christianity, and he was correct. What is commonly interpreted as Christianity in “revealed religion” is Christian in terminology and triads only. One might as well suggest that the Bohr atomic theory is Christian because of its reliance on groups of three (though there are current theories of religion that would probably not find this suggestion implausible).

JESUS AS “THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL”

“Unhappy Consciousness” was concerned with the more theological and metaphysical aspects of Christianity. But there is another aspect of Christianity which many Protestants—Kant and Hegel among them—would argue is even more essential: Christian *ethics*. In Hegel’s early manuscripts and in Kant’s *Religion*, moral concerns *define* religious doctrines, and religion is justified *solely* on the basis of the support it provides for morality. Accordingly, Jesus can be considered, not as God incarnate, but as a human moral example. In a grotesque fashion, Hegel’s “Life of Jesus” attempted to consider Jesus only as a normally born and normally buried human being, who distinguished himself as the first Kantian in his “Sermon on the Mount.” The attempt was abortive, but the motivation evident; the Jesus that interested Hegel was not the Christ of the Trinity but rather the Jewish moral teacher as a late colleague and an illustrious competitor of Socrates.

Because Hegel thought far more of Jesus than he did of Christianity as such, Jesus appears in the *Phenomenology* long after we have left the unhappiness of Christianity. This is a historical Jesus, not a divinity, a “beautiful soul” who teaches ethics by example. This Jesus appropriately follows Kantian morality in the dialectic, giving the bare forms of the categorical imperative substantial content. This section is the last section of chapter 6, “Spirit”, and immediately precedes the long chapter on “Religion.” It is worth noting that the section ends

it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge. (671)

“The Beautiful Soul: Evil and Forgiveness” (*die Schöne Seele: das Böse und seine Verzeihung* (658–71, esp. 668f.)) has often appeared as a mystery to commentators, an arbitrary addition to the fairly solid discussion of Kant and conscience preceding it. The “beautiful soul” was a well-known Romantic phenomenon, discussed extensively by Jacobi, dramatized by Goethe, and enacted by Novalis. Accordingly, this

section of Hegel is typically interpreted as an awkwardly placed discussion of this phenomenon.⁹¹ But however obnoxious this bourgeois melodrama may have been in war-torn Germany in 1806, it is not just the Romantic "beautiful soul" that Hegel portrays at this prestigious stage of the dialectic. The references to "self-destruction" may fit certain Romantic heroes, but they are surely tailor-made to the Passion of Jesus, just as the somewhat strained conceptual nativity scene of the following chapter (referring back to "Unhappy Consciousness") is tailor-made for the beginning of the Jesus-story. One might well agree that references to Novalis (including the pointed reference to "pining away in consumption") are out of place here, but a discussion of Jesus as moral teacher is surely very much *in* place here; in fact, it is absolutely necessary if we are to make any sense of this discussion at this all-important juncture of "Spirit" and "Religion."

In the *Phenomenology*, the "beautiful soul" appears immediately following "Conscience," Fichte's attempt to reconcile Kant's formal morality with individual feeling. Hegel sees "conscience" as a quasi-religious position, "God immediately present to mind and heart" (656). With the retreat of conscience into itself, with the recognition that it is incapable of distinguishing between moral and immoral dictates of conscience, with its rejection of "all externality," conscience evolves into the beautiful soul. Hegel explicitly links this "soul" to "Unhappy Consciousness" (658) in its withdrawal from the world—

It lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action and an existence; and in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world, and persists in its self-willed impotence to renounce its self which is reduced to the extreme of ultimate abstraction. . . . it vanishes like a shapeless vapour dissolving into thin air. (658)

The beautiful soul abstains from moral judgment, places itself *above* such judgment, and ultimately amounts to a condemnation of moral concerns. Thus we recall that many of Jesus' teachings were not moral exhortations but meta-moral preachings, attitudes to be taken toward moral laws and transgressions of laws rather than laws themselves. But judgment *about* moral laws is still judgment, even moral judgment, and the "morality" of the beautiful soul is to place itself *above* all such judgment ("Judge not that ye be not judged"). To do so, the beautiful soul turns to the spirit of forgiveness, the ability to look beyond the "moments" of moral and immoral action to the whole of Spirit. ("The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind")

91. E.g., Baillie, pp. 642, 667, 676; Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 129.

(669).) Here is Jesus' contribution to Spirit, not Christian morality as such but the teaching that we should rise above morality. This does not mean, of course, that we should be *immoral*. It means that we should acknowledge our participation in flawed humanity, with its many varying moralities and provincial prejudices, and view our own efforts at morality with a kind of humility, as part of a universal brotherhood of mutual weakness and forgiveness.⁹²

Why should we believe that this beautiful and forgiving soul is Jesus? If we confine ourselves to the *Phenomenology*, the identity is debatable, and our argument can only be that the Jesus-interpretation renders the discussion unquestionably essential to the dialectic as a whole and provides an easily understandable bridge to the chapter on "Religion." But there is better evidence, if we once again return to Hegel's early "theological" manuscripts, in particular, the fourth of these, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate."⁹³ Hegel explicitly introduces a picture of the "beautiful soul" as Jesus.⁹⁴ The beautiful soul is the unity of courage and passivity which "renounces its own mastery of reality, renounces might, and lets something alien, a law of the judge's lips, pass sentence on him." The beautiful soul voluntarily gives up his rights and his possessions, including the right to sit in judgment over others and the right to defend himself ("If any side of him is touched . . .," i.e. "turn the other cheek").⁹⁵ By placing himself above all such rights, Hegel adds, Jesus ultimately destroys himself. The beautiful soul withdraws from life and the world, "like a sensitive plant, he withdraws into himself when he is touched." "Hence Jesus required his friends to forsake father, mother, and everything in order to avoid entry into a league with the profane world."⁹⁶ Jesus renounces everything to maintain himself, refrains from action and moral judgment but ultimately must find that such a course becomes more judgmental than the judgments it condemns ("It sets up a fate for them and does not pardon them") until he realizes that forgiveness, not judgment, is the only way to spiritual unity; "Thy sins are forgiven thee, not a cancellation of punishment, as an elevation above law and fate."⁹⁷

This is precisely the same progression that we find in the *Phenome-*

92. The conflict between secular ethics and religious faith is not unfamiliar in religious literature. Kierkegaard, most famously, takes the Abraham and Isaac story of the Old Testament and uses it to illustrate that potential conflict and declares it to be unresolvable except by faith. ("The teleological suspension of the ethical," in *Fear and Trembling*, trans. W. Lowrie (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954)).

93. *Early Theo. Mss.*, pp. 234–44.

94. *Ibid.* 236, 239.

95. *Ibid.* 235.

96. *Ibid.* (cf. Luke 14: 26).

97. *Ibid.* 239 (cf. Luke 7: 48).

nology, and so we may have some confidence that our interpretation was Hegel's intention as well. But, though Hegel's opinion of Jesus has mellowed since his essay in 1795, he still accuses Jesus of positivity, still has limited regard for him as a person, and still conceives the "other-worldliness" of his renunciation a *de facto* compliance with evil. Ultimately, the beautiful and forgiving soul may provide the "word of reconciliation" that is necessary for our "reciprocal recognition which is Absolute Spirit" (670), and he may represent "God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge" (671). But the historical Jesus is still at best an example, at most a "moment" of Spirit, and consequently, he disappears from the dialectic at this point, before we have entered the dialectic of "Religion" proper.

Christianity makes other appearances in the *Phenomenology* too, as "Deism" in the section on "Enlightenment" and as Kant's "Postulates of Practical Reason" in the "Morality" section preceding "Conscience and the Beautiful Soul." But religion is not a function of either theoretical reason (as in Deism) or practical reason (as in Kant); it is a search for unity which is neither one nor the other, but that ambitious sense of ultimate identity that Kant had struggled with in his third *Critique* and Schelling had made the centerpiece of his Identity-philosophy. As religion, this ultimate identity is to be found not in Buddhist pantheism—where one might reasonably look for it—nor in Spinoza, where it had already been handed to us on a philosophical platter. It is to be found in "revealed religion," ostensibly Christianity, despite all of Hegel's criticisms in the past.

RELIGION REVEALED

Finally, we can broach the penultimate section of the *Phenomenology*, "Revealed Religion" and the self-recognition of Spirit as Spirit (755–87).⁹⁸ The question is, Is "revealed religion" Christianity? And our answer is, "In name only" (though, significantly, Hegel never bothers to call it by name). The language is indisputably the language of Lutheran theology. But at every turn, Hegel makes the critical point that the terms have been misunderstood by "picture-thinking," and that what is or ought to be a conception of ourselves as Spirit in the present is misunderstood as a story in the distant past, along with a promise of a distant future to come (787).

The simple essence of revealed religion is the identity of God and

98. Cf. *Encyclopaedia*, VII, sec. iii. B.b. 564–71; *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, Pt. iii, pp. 1–151.

man as Spirit. But the vehicle of Hegel's presentation, as well as the single most important historical-mythological symbol of this identity, is the Trinity. Thus, as in "Unhappy Consciousness," the section "Revealed Religion" is set as a concern for a three-part relationship, God, Jesus as Son of God, and Holy Spirit (758–63).

The doctrine of the Trinity has its origin in Jewish theology. In the traditional Christian church, the third term, Spirit, has always been obscure, vaguely referred to by Paul and the early writers as God entering into the Holy community through Jesus and the Incarnation. Lutheranism shifted the emphasis to the Holy Spirit and, obviously, it is this shift that weighs heavily in Hegel's speculations. The debate over the true nature of the Trinity had been going on for centuries, of course, and many Christians tended to reject it altogether on the grounds that it violates the central canon of Judeo-Christian monotheism—the singularity and unity of God. This is Hegel's argument too, and, toward the end of his discussion, he even pokes fun at the very idea of a "Trinity" (Why not a Quaternity, or even a five-in-One? he asks (776)). In Hegel's search for Spirit, however, it is the Father and the Son who are sacrificed to the third term; God is reduced to pure thought and the Son becomes no one in particular. (Hegel also lampoons the very idea of interpreting God and Jesus in the language of a "natural relationship," i.e. father and son (771).) God is One. God is nothing but the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is only in us;

Finite consciousness knows God only to the extent to which God knows himself, spirit is nothing other than those who worship him.⁹⁹

Man knows God only insofar as God knows himself as man. The Spirit of man, whereby he knows God, is simply the spirit of God himself.¹⁰⁰

This incarnation of the divine Being, or the fact that it essentially and directly has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of the absolute religion. In this religion the divine Being is known as Spirit, or this religion is the consciousness of the divine Being that is Spirit. For Spirit is the knowledge of oneself in the externalization of oneself . . . (*Phenomenology* 759)

Given the long debates and the age-old charges of "heresy" on the proper interpretation of the Trinity, and given Hegel's rather complete education on the subject and my own lack thereof, there is no point going into the elaborate historical and theological background of Hegel's discussion except by way of laying out the key alternatives.

99. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 327.

100. *Ibid.* 496.

On the one hand, there is (more or less) the traditional view, that the Trinity is indeed a unity, which raises awesome metaphysical and logical questions about how that is possible. There is the weaker Protestant view that Christ is God incarnate and the Holy Spirit permeates the community on that basis, and the more heretical view that only God is God, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, even if divine, are not. Then there is the blasphemous view—defended by Hegel in his early writings—that Jesus is just a man, a special man, perhaps, but nothing more. It is blasphemous because—however honored or moral this Jesus may be—he is not the Christ of Christianity. The literal incarnation, on either the traditional view or perhaps the weaker construal, is the very essence of that religion. But this is the view that emerges from the section on “Revealed Religion” in the *Phenomenology*, that Jesus is no one in particular, that it is the Holy Spirit, and not some Fatherly God, who not only enters into but who is all of us, not only Jesus.

What makes this topic so difficult to talk about is both its elaborate and perplexing metaphysical history and Hegel's own intentional obscurity on central points. On the one hand, one can find the most pious spokesmen for Christianity asserting theses that sound very much like Hegel (Aquinas on God as Thought, for example, or Luther—whom Hegel quotes and utilizes liberally). On the other hand, there is little doubt, reading through the traditional language, that Hegel himself is anything but pious. He claims that what he is doing is to convert the *form* of Christian dogma from “picture-thinking” to conceptual truth, but it is not hard to show that what he saves (as essential content) is not Christianity, and that the form into which he converts it is wholly compatible with atheistic humanism.

For example, Hegel's analysis of the Creation is somewhat less than faith-inspiring. This too, is an example of “picture-thinking” and not to be taken seriously. Using a familiar Schellingian ploy, Hegel analyzes Spirit in two ways, as substance becoming self-consciousness, and as self-consciousness making itself substance.¹⁰¹ The first, in standard philosophical jargon, is Aristotle's metaphysics, hardly Christian and barely theistic; the second, in religious picture-thinking, is the Judeo-Christian conception of the Creation. But for Hegel, (as for Spinoza) Creation is not to be understood as a temporal coming-into-being, and Spirit in any case is not to be understood apart from its Creation (755, 774).

Hegel's view of the Fall, similarly, is an atemporal conceptual recon-

101. Cf. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 347–48.

struction (775). He interprets "innocence" as simply not yet knowing oneself, "the Fall" as nothing more than the recognition of evil, and evil as ultimately indistinguishable from (that is, part of the same moral world as) good (776). Hegel also points to the story of the fall of the devil as more picture-thinking, and it is at this point that he blasphemously suggests that Lucifer be added to the Trinity to yield a Quaternity (776), and perhaps the fallen angels too (for "a five-in-one").

It is the "middle term" of the Trinity that exercises Hegel the most; God or "Spirit" is easily reinterpreted as immanent, and the "Holy Ghost" already has precisely the status Hegel wants it to have, as Spirit effused throughout the community. But it is the role of Jesus that distinguishes Christianity from other religions, and the notion of "incarnation" which "contradicts all understanding."¹⁰² Christianity is the theory of the incarnation, and it is Hegel's interpretation of this momentous non-event that shows his humanist colors.

Lessing had asked, "How is it possible that Christianity can base the whole of its faith on an historical accident?"¹⁰³ It is not a pressing question still, but the problem of contingency, when applied to the existence of a necessary being, seemed to be incomprehensible indeed. Hegel's answer, in fact, is found in Goethe, who described this as an allegory, "a particular considered only as an illustration, as an example of the universal."¹⁰⁴ All men and women are incarnations of God. It is not the *life* of Jesus that is significant, but his *death*. It is "the vanishing of the immediate existence known to be Absolute Being" in which "the universal self-consciousness of the community" is born, "not the individual by himself, but together with the consciousness of the community and what he is for this community, is the complete whole of the individual spirit" (763). (Findlay: "If Christ does not go, the Holy Ghost cannot come to the worshipping community . . . God as a picture must die in order that God as thought may live."¹⁰⁵)

Lessing's question, reiterated later by Kierkegaard, might be restated as the question how the Eternal (Unchangeable) could enter into the time-bound events of history. Hegel's answer here is that the historic event of the incarnation and the death of Christ does not matter at all; it is "dead and cannot be known," "an heirloom handed down by tradition," a "degraded content" (771).

Jesus was not a special case but only an example—

102. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, p. 76. Cf. Kierkegaard in *CUP*: "Christianity is the paradox; paradox and passion are the mutual fit . . . Faith is the objective uncertainty along with the repulsion of the absurd held fast in the passion of inwardness." And, "what is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into being in time" (*ibid.*).

103. Cf. Kierkegaard, *CUP*, II, 2.

104. In *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. Ronnfeldt (London: Scott, 1897).

105. Findlay, "Analysis," pp. 586, 589.

The dead divine Man or human God is *in himself* the universal self-consciousness; this he has to become explicitly *for this self-consciousness*. (781)

This passage is of particular interest, first because it is one of the few places that Hegel actually uses the terms "Man" and "God", and philosophically because the reference to "this self-consciousness" only makes sense here as a secular reference, not to God but to us ("Man" in general). The phrase "in himself" here might better be translated as "implicitly" (as in Baillie) and so we see the continuing theme of Hegel's analysis—that Christ is significant as an *example*, a symbol (in picture-thinking) of the conceptual truth that there is no God but in and through humanity. Furthermore, the traditional Christian teaching that, in Christianity (unlike Judaism and other religions) God "comes down" to man (760) is turned around by Hegel to declare that the identity of Man and God is "the highest essence" of God (*ibid.*) and, in a familiar Hegelian twist, "the lowest is the highest" (*ibid.*). The point again and again becomes clear—there is no "alien" God who reaches down to us; God is Spirit and Spirit is us, nothing more. (See esp. 759, 761, 763, 779, 781–84.) It is the *death* of God, not His historical life, that is of greater significance. But this is not because (as picture-thinking would have it) the death of Christ is an all-important event which signifies the salvation of all true believers; the death of God signifies the *unimportance* of Christ, and the fact that our lives too are Holy and Immortal, through the universal Spirit of the community (781–84). Indeed, the most tragic mistake of picture thinking (i.e. Christianity) is the idea that our salvation and unification with the Holy Spirit will come some time in the distant future, when the truth is that the unification of ourselves with Spirit is *now* if only we will realize it (787). But in realizing this, it is doubtful on what grounds we might also say that we have become or are still Christians. What we have done, in effect, is to throw out the whole of the Bible and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, to reassert an ancient truth that both the Bible and that tradition have always rejected as the ultimate heresy—the view that the human Spirit, in and for itself, is God.

I do not know how to pursue this argument much further. The thicket of theological interpretations of these matters is such that no doubt a good Christian Hegelian could reinterpret these themes once again in a respectable if not exactly orthodox way.¹⁰⁶ In my secular impatience, I sometimes find it necessary to use a Humean razor, and

106. "You may advance the most contradictory speculations about the Christian religion, but no matter what they may be, numerous voices are always raised against you, alleging that what you maintain may touch on this or that system of the Christian religion but not on the Christian religion itself" (Positivity-essay, p. 67).

ask, rather bluntly, does Hegel believe anything that a thorough-going atheistic humanist cannot believe—even in the guise of “the Absolute” and “infinity”? Does he believe in any sense in a God other than ourselves, in the Divinity of Christ in the only sense that can be called “Christian,” in the literal or at least symbolic truth or much (if not all) of the Scriptures? The answer seems to be in every case “no.” What religion reveals for Hegel is our striving for absolute Unity, for “the infinite,” for something beyond the hurly-burly of everyday life and ordinary happiness. But to think that this is Christianity seems to me to be absurd. Hegel is no Christian. The Absolute is in no interesting sense, God.

HEGEL'S HUMANISM AS A SPECIES OF PANTHEISM

. . . what in religion was *content* or a form for presenting an *other*, is here *Self's* own *act* . . . This last form of Spirit—the Spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its Concept . . . in this realization—this is absolute knowing; it is Spirit that knows itself in the form of Spirit, or a *comprehensive knowing*. (*Phenomenology*, 797–98)

I ask that my impatience with theological niceties will be excused as an antidote for the excessive apologetics that have long been forthcoming from the Hegelian “right,” for example, when Findlay suggests that Hegel might be called Christian for his appreciation that something is “god-like in the facts of human thought,”¹⁰⁷ or when McTaggart argues at considerable length that

No religion in history resembles the Hegelian philosophy so closely as Christianity. . . . The orthodox Christian doctrines are not compatible with Hegel's teaching, but they are far closer to that teaching than the doctrines of any other religion known to history.¹⁰⁸

These euphemisms do not hide the fact that “closeness” does not compensate for “incompatibility,” and the claim that Hegel's ultimate conception of religion is closer to Christianity “than any other religion known to history” is clearly false. Once the incarnation has been purged of its orthodox mythology, it is clear that Hegel's conception of religion is far closer to a great many Eastern religions than to Christianity, probably closer in spirit to Greek folk-religion than to medieval Catholicism, as close to Hasidic Judaism as to traditional

107. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 349.

108. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, pp. 249–50.

Lutheranism, and far closer to Spinoza's pantheism than to the Christianity of the Church and the New Testament. Ultimately, even McTaggart is forced to conclude that Hegel's philosophy "reveals itself as an antagonist [to Christianity]—an antagonist all the more deadly because it works not by denial but by completion."¹⁰⁹ But what is this "completion" but "*aufheben*", in the same sense that the philosophy of the *Phenomenology* "outgrows" Romantic individualism and the fad of phrenology. Similarly, Findlay ultimately admits that Hegel "may be held to have given merely a 'persuasive definition' of 'religion,' . . . and is simply 'cashing in' on the widespread approval (of such terms)."¹¹⁰ The same may be said for his use of Christian terminology, for it must be admitted, and it is time to do so without apology, that Hegel is no Christian.

Toward the end of his examination of "Hegelianism and Christianity," McTaggart makes a final attempt to "save" Hegel, if not Hegel's Christianity—

It is impossible to believe that it was a deliberate deception, prompted by a decision for his own interest. There is nothing whatsoever in Hegel's life which could give us any reason to accuse him of such conduct.¹¹¹

Less sympathetically, H.S. Macran does accuse Hegel of "self-deceiving sophistry or sordid dishonesty," and insists that he is "mistermed" as a Lutheran.¹¹² We may insist that Hegel's conduct was neither "deliberate deception" nor "sordid dishonesty," keeping in mind his own precocious awareness of the "unconscious" forces of reason and his teaching that philosophers typically signify more than they intend. Not a "deliberate deception," perhaps, but it is very likely intentional obscurity. There is no lie in Hegel's claims, and his atheism is right there in the text if we are willing to look for it. But of course, most of his readers were not expecting any such conclusions, preferred not to find them, and so, naturally, they did not.

It might be maintained that Hegel, though not a Christian, is yet a theist, namely, a member of that elite and controversial group of philosophers championed by Spinoza called "pantheists." Stirling, for example, admits that Hegel is a pantheist, "but with a purer reverence for God than pantheism of ordinary views."¹¹³ The fidelity to the master may again make us smile; but Hegel often argues in such a fashion;

109. Ibid., pp. 250–51.

110. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 131.

111. McTaggart, *Studies*, p. 245.

112. H.S. Macran, *Hegel's Doctrine of Formal Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

113. Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel*, vol. 1, p. 87.

The realm of Spirit is all-comprehensive; it includes everything that ever has interested or ever will interest man.¹¹⁴

The view that Hegel's atheism is a form of pantheism raises two insuperable problems, however; first, Hegel vociferously denies that he is a pantheist.¹¹⁵ Second, it may seriously be doubted that pantheism, the name aside, is a form of theism at all. Applying our Humean razor, we ask, "What would a pantheist admit to exist that an atheist would not?" But to say God is the world ("Without the world, there is no God") is clearly not to make any such admission. A pantheist may approach his world with a more religious attitude than his straightforwardly atheistic colleagues, but not with a richer ontology.¹¹⁶

Hegel's relationship to pantheism was a point of controversy even in his own time. Accordingly, to avoid the charge (which had recently forced Fichte from his position), Hegel openly attacked the position and attempted to distinguish it from his own (in the *Encyclopaedia*, "Philosophy of Spirit," para. 573). It is worth noting the defensive and at times abrasive tone of the argument, in contrast with Hegel's usually casual and often ironic style, a sure sign of the polemicism that often accompanies inadequate convictions.

Paragraph 573 is among the longest of the *Encyclopaedia*, another sign that we are finding Hegel at his most defensive. The section is filled with insults, "shallow pantheism and shallow identity," "an attenuated and emptied God," "an indeterminate and abstract God," "the stale gossip of oneness or identity," and, regarding the pantheist interpretation of his own thought, "it is only his own stupidity and the falsification due to such misconceptions which generate the imagination and the allegation of such pantheism." Hegel betrays a personal concern (for example, employing considerable use of the first person singular, which is *very* unusual for him) for the fact that the allegation of pantheism has replaced the charge of atheism against philosophers (the latter "having *too little* of God," the former having

114. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction ("Reason in History"), p. 20.

115. *Encyclopaedia*, 573.

116. One might object that this too-Humean criterion eliminates a large class of theists, namely, those (as in "plant and animal worship") who identify some particular object as having divine status (whether this be cats, lizards, fire, clouds, or the king). The theist and the atheist would agree in ontology but disagree in theology. What is the difference? Not one of philosophy but, one might say, of "attitude," though this need be no small matter. One might convert a mediocre dinner into a feast by saying "grace" over it, and so too there may be all the difference in life between someone who sees the world as divine and someone who sees it as mere material "substance." But this only points to what Hegel broadly conceived as a "religious" outlook, not to theism or Christianity.

"too much of him"). "To impute Pantheism instead of Atheism to Philosophy is part of the modern habit of mind," he accuses, "of the new piety and the new theology." But his argument against pantheism turns on a small technical point, one which may indeed have significance for certain metaphysical disputes but is surely not sufficient to establish Hegel as an orthodox theist. The point rests upon the distinction between "everything" considered as a collection or totality of things ("empirical things, without distinction, whether higher or lower in the scale . . . each and every secular thing is God") and "everything" considered as a unity, a "universe" (what Heidegger, struggling with the same problem, would call "the worldhood of the world"). What Hegel denies is that he has ever claimed that "everything is God" in the first sense. But he clearly holds this view in the second sense, so long as we insist that this "everything" is a "subject as well as substance." In this holistic sense, Hegel is neither more nor less of a pantheist than Spinoza or Fichte. In this same section, Hegel curiously defends Spinoza's philosophy as a monotheism, not a pantheism, which errs in its "apprehension of God as substance, stopping short of defining substance as subject and as spirit." But surely this is a misreading of Spinoza, who insisted that thought was one of the essential attributes of the One Substance, and it is even more unfair to Fichte, who shared with Hegel the notion of the Absolute as absolute *Ego*. But Hegel's argument moves quickly from these controversial issues into one of the more notorious red herrings of philosophy, a several-page celebration of "the most poetical, sublime pantheism" of the *Bhagavat-Gita*, complete with several lengthy verses. In short, Hegel's argument is a pedant's delight, advancing his defense with loaded questions (Is God an ass or an ox?), impressive by learned distractions and conscientiously speaking away from the point at issue. But Hegel's own position, that of God as Spirit and nothing but Spirit, places him in the pantheist camp without qualification. And pantheism, as we have argued (despite Hegel's objection) is no more than pious atheism.

This is not, finally, to deny that Hegel might be considered a man of spiritual reverence. In his *Logic*, for example, he tells us that "Speculative truth means very much the same as what in special connection with religious experience and doctrines, used to be called Mysticism."¹¹⁷ But Hegel's mysticism is emphatically without mystery, and his reverence is without God. Hegel has a certain reverence for thought, for life, above all for humanity. But he is not, in the usual

117. *Logic*, VI, 82.

sense, a religious man, much less the “greatest abstract thinker of Christianity.” He is, perhaps, one of the first great humanists of German philosophy. That was Hegel’s secret, and the source of Kierkegaard’s righteous complaint:

Modern philosophy is neither more nor less than paganism. But it wants to make itself and us believe that it is Christianity.¹¹⁸

118. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954). Thus MacIntyre (in seminar, Feb. 1980): “if Kierkegaard hadn’t existed, it would be necessary to invent him.” Alternatively, “God invented Kierkegaard to throw light on Hegel.”

(Tentative) Conclusion: “Absolute Knowing”

The skies were mine, and so were the Sun and Moon and Stars, and
all the World was mine, and I the only Spectator and Enjoyer of it.
—Thomas Traherne

The Absolute, Hegel tells us in the Preface (20) is essentially a *result*, the final product of a process, the process being the conceptual development described in the *Phenomenology*. Accordingly, the final chapter on “Absolute Knowing” is mercifully short, half of it once again reviewing the whole of the *Phenomenology*, in case we missed it the first time, the other half consisting of an outpouring of exuberance concerning the self-recognition of Spirit and, no doubt, the end of an extremely painful several months of pressured work.

Since Hegel is mercifully short, we will be too. There is no need to once again explain how it is that consciousness gropes towards self-consciousness and self-consciousness stumbles toward recognition of itself as Spirit until, finally, in the images of Christianity and the Incarnation, it discovers its true identity (788–98). Nor is this the place to follow through Hegel’s final instructions, that we can really understand all of this only by turning our attention to history (“Spirit emptied out into time” (808)) as well as to the philosophy of logic and nature. (Hegel’s advertisement for his works to come.) Indeed, what is most remarkable about the concluding chapter of the *Phenomenology* is how little it says, how empty it is, and how many questions it leaves unanswered.

... from the chalice of this realm of spirits,
foams forth for Him his own infinitude.

With these words from Schiller, Hegel ends his book. But whatever Hegel’s intentions regarding “absolute knowing,” his finale is philosophically unsatisfying. It chimes with enthusiasm but, unlike Bee-

thoven's use of similar themes from Schiller, it ends in a discord. Good Christians who go to Hegel for a statement of faith may well claim to find it here, but for the philosophical reader who has worked so hard, it seems, this is but a metaphor, a bit of foam at the end of the "Bacchanalian revel." Despite Hegel's *caveat* in the Preface (9), he has given us a chalice full of edification.

We know by now what "absolute knowing" consists of, though we shall learn little more of it here. In the narrow context of post-Kantian idealism and the misleadingly smooth transition (created largely by Hegel himself) from Kant to Fichte to Schelling to Hegel, "Absolute Knowing" and "the Absolute" can be best understood as a technical demand for the correction of certain difficulties in Kant, particularly the separation of the "standpoints of Nature and Freedom" and the critical refusal to accept as "knowledge" some of the most important principles of philosophy—not least among them the idea that the world itself has a purpose and is meaningful and benignly disposed to humanity. In the broader cultural context, "the Absolute" is the philosophical shadow of Hölderlin's grand metaphor, a quasi-religious attempt to understand the underlying unity of life and its ultimate purposiveness. In the context of Christian theology and the already extravagant reinterpretations of Christ and the incarnation and the relationship between God and Man that Hegel was learning in the *Stift*, one can indeed view the whole of Hegel's philosophy as a rethinking of Christianity and the Absolute as God. In the political-cultural context defined by Napoleon, the French Revolution, Schiller, and Goethe, one can plausibly view Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a plea for unity. In the face of the new romanticism, which had become quite influential in Jena in the first years of the century, one can understand the *Phenomenology* as a *tour de force* in defense of reason and articulation, a demonstration that one could indeed talk at length and intelligibly about the ultimate topics—God, the meaning of life, the unity of man and nature—all summarized in a word, "the Absolute."

As a philosophical thesis, one hesitates to make even the crudest concluding attempt to summarize this labyrinthine work as a single argument, much less as a demonstration or a "proof," and yet, with all of the usual warnings, I think such a summary might be tried. If one were to ask—"What do all of the arguments and demonstrations of the *Phenomenology* add up to?"—the answer surely cannot be, "absolute knowing," however that pretentious phrase is to be interpreted. But the various arguments and allegories, refutations and reductions to absurdities of the various "forms of consciousness" do add up; it is a largely negative but by no means unimpressive thesis: no philosoph-

ical viewpoint, no life-style or conceptual framework, no isolated argument or demonstrative proof, no matter how sound, no matter how persuasive, can ever be adequate by itself. For every premise or set of premises, there is a context and a set of presuppositions that has been taken for granted; for every argument, there is a perspective that has not been challenged; for every moral principle or ethical argument, there is a social milieu and a set of cultural needs and a history that provides the stage upon which such exercises are intelligible. In short, the purpose of the *Phenomenology* is to show that *nothing can be left out*. It is, in the pop-jargon of the late 20th century, a defense of *holism*, a grand demonstration that all of our principles and arguments and philosophical "methods" and "schools" and "movements" are "abstractions" within a larger context, and make sense only within that context. The logic of Hegel's works has been called "the logic of passion," an exciting idea, but probably without much meaning. I would rather suggest (hopefully with some meaning, in context) that Hegel's logic, at least in the *Phenomenology*, is a *logic of inadequacy*, a logic whose whole point is to remind us always of our limited vision, our unexposed presuppositions, our unwillingness to see the other side until forced to. This explains rather clearly, I would propose, why the last chapter of the *Phenomenology* is so short and so unsatisfying; it does not state a final thesis so much as it tells us that there can be no final thesis, only a certain humility, which, as in Kant and other German writers (culminating in Nietzsche) is stated with a kind of cosmic *Arroganz*.

Accepting this multidimensional sweep of Hegel's great book, however, does not yet explain the exhilaration with which the book ends, nor does it begin to answer the many questions Hegel leaves unanswered, which in fact continue to define the problems of philosophy today. As for the sense of exhilaration, this has been too handily translated into a quasi-Christian sense of revelation by many of Hegel's British and German interpreters, to be distinguished from Spinoza's pantheism but identified with Christianity in manners too subtle to be exhilarating—or plausible. In fact, religious interpretations aside, it is an extremely uncomplicated, untechnical, and familiar emotion that Hegel is expressing here. It is, in a banal phrase, that life is good and meaningful. It is, as Martin Luther King once put it, that glorious sense of "having been to the mountain top"—of seeing the whole panorama of human joys and sufferings and feeling edified and heartened by the view.

Mighty tomes have been written about Hegel's Absolute and "the identity of Thought and Being," but it seems to me that one has missed

the simple grandeur of Hegel's book altogether if one is not left with that old rationalist's sense, that passionate sense, that the world is ultimately meaningful. Hegel's vision is a world that is moving toward an end, a goal, an ideal state, an ideal state which begins with our knowledge of ourselves, "thought thinking itself" in the old Aristotelean terminology, "Spirit recognizing itself as Spirit" in Hegel's and Hölderlin's language. It is, in a simple-minded word, an exuberant sense of *optimism*—the belief that "the actual is rational and the rational is actual," the confidence that humanity can be a harmonious whole with itself and with its world, and that this need not be merely a matter of hope or faith but *knowledge*, indeed *absolute knowledge*.

It is this exuberant sense of optimism that Schopenhauer—Hegel's bitter but then unknown antagonist—would spend his life rejecting. It was an earlier version of optimism, by Leibniz, which had inspired the French *philosophe* Voltaire to exercise his wit in *Candide*. And indeed, it is not hard to argue from our more cynical 20th-century vantage point, that Schopenhauer and Voltaire make a far better case for pessimism than Leibniz and Hegel do for their optimism. One might say that both positions are a matter of perspective—and perhaps of infantile breast feeding experiences as well—rather than philosophical positions to be proven or refuted. But this does none of these great thinkers justice, for they did indeed see themselves as arguing these viewpoints and refuting the others, as showing that the world was meaningful or meaningless. At the end of the *Phenomenology*, what we "know" is a sense of exhausted exultation rather than the outcome of a long-winded proof. Nevertheless the whole of the *Phenomenology*, whatever else it is, must be appreciated as a necessarily long-winded demonstration of the essential rationality and acceptability of the human world.

In this study, I have argued at length against the traditional interpretation of Hegel as a religious—that is, Christian—thinker. But in these final comments on "absolute knowing", it is worth once again reminding ourselves that the rejection of religions does not mean the rejection of all religiousness. Indeed, what Hegel is all about—as J.N. Findlay points out in his study—is just that sense of awe and appreciation for life and reflection on life that has always defined the richest religious experiences, within or without any organized conceptual or institutional framework which might be designated a "religion." Hegel's emphasis on Spirit in the *Phenomenology* is just this vision of life as a whole, a heartfelt romantic appeal to rejuvenate the "spirit" that Christianity sometimes tries to teach us, though Hegel is neither a Romantic nor a Christian. His animated sense of life has little of the Gothic mysteriousness of his poetic colleagues (indeed, by the *Logic*,

even "Spirit" had given way to the "Idea"). And Hegel's Spirit has nothing whatever of the "other-worldly" about it, much less the details of salvation and the Resurrection which define Christianity in all of its variations. But Hegel is keenly aware, as we must be too, of that disastrous dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, which may be professionally summarized in the Kantian division of "Nature and Spirit" but is more familiar to us in everyday life as the routine deadening of our world and the increased isolation of what we call "spiritual matters" to the minimum allotment of time in our busy weekly schedules. Hegel's attack on Enlightenment "utility" (today read "managerial efficiency") was first of all an attack on the reduction of life to trifles, the unreflective pursuit of ill-defined "success" coupled only hypocritically (no matter how sincerely felt) with an eviscerated sense of institutionalized religion which alone provides us with a few minutes to think about (or numbly brood about) such all-important matters as life and death and the meaning of it all.

The *Phenomenology*, whatever else it is, is an epic "Yea-saying" to life—as Nietzsche later comes to call such enthusiasm—life with all of its conflicts and tragedies, not on the basis of abstract rationalizations as in Leibniz, so easily lampoonable by Voltaire, and not on the basis of faith in some distant resolution, as in "other-worldly" Christianity. Hegel's optimism, is a sympathetic (which is not to say "uncritical") look at the whole of human history and experience, with all of its brutality and stupidity, in order to see what good underlies our every thought and every action. He finds it in the development of that holistic sense of unity he calls "Spirit." Recognizing this, in turn, is what he calls "Absolute Knowing"—which does not mean "knowing everything." It rather means—recognizing one's limitations. But this in itself can be a liberating, even exhilarating vision. In the words of Hegel's unacknowledged historicist heir, Nietzsche;

... precisely because we seek knowledge, let us not be ungrateful to such resolute reversals of accustomed perspectives and valuations which the spirit has, with apparent mischievousness and futility, raged against itself for so long: to see differently in this way for once, to *want* to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future "objectivity"—the latter understood not as "contemplation without interest" (which is nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to *control* one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge.

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject."¹

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967) III, 12.

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